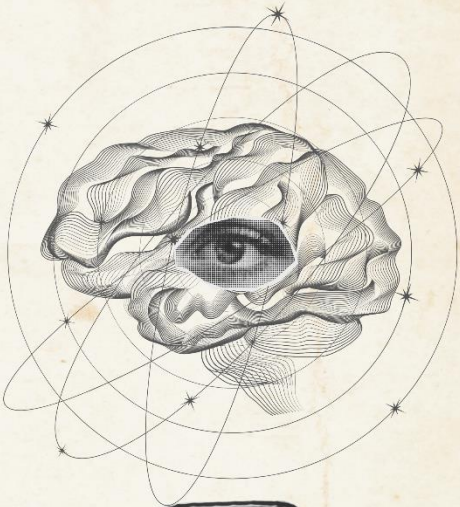
The eyes are useless when the mind is blind.

Learning *to* See

25 ESSAYS ON LIFE AND SOCIETY



MTHOKOZISI MABHENA

Learning *to* See

25 Essays on Life and Society

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GRATITUDE

To everyone who made my life a little better than I deserved. Thank you, sincerely.

In the spirit of twenty five essays, here are twenty-five people I am grateful for: Gugulethu Mabhena, Monica Mabhena, Thandokuhle Cleo Sibanda, Fanele Mguni, Lynden Anesu Lungu, ProVy Shumba (also known as Motsamai), Wayne Ndebele, Nomuhle Mhlambeni, Valentine Makoni, Agnes Phiri, Strive and Tsitsi Masiyiwa, Senator Tholakele Khumalo, Clement Mguni, Costa Mangena, Dr. Zungezile Ntini, Ephias Nemachena, Jeffery Mauld, Mbongeni Mabhena, Bongani Mhlanga (known as uBongo), Michael Mhlanga, Thabo Arthur Dube, Thabisani A. Ndlovu, Petronella Nancy Thandiwe Grace Jamela, Roamello Ngwenya, and Mxolisi Masuku. If I were to write the names of all I am grateful to, I would run out of space. Any omission is limit of space, not the lack of gratitude. Even if your name is not mentioned here, know that I am incredibly grateful for your contribution in my life.

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FOREWORD

A man cannot unsee the truth. He cannot willingly return to darkness, or go blind once he has the gift of sight, any more than he can be unborn. We are the only species capable of self-reflection. The only species with the toxin of self-doubt written into our genetic code. Unequal to our gifts, we build, we buy, we consume. We wrap us in the illusion of material success. We cheat and deceive as we claw our way to the pinnacle of what we define as achievement: superiority to other men. There is a sickness inside us. Rising like the bile that leaves that bitter taste at the back of our throats. It's there in every one of you. We deny its existence until one day the body rebels against the mind and screams out, "I am not a well man." But the truth cannot be ignored. For only when we know what ails us can we hope to find the cure.
- From the movie "A Cure for Wellness" (2016)

"Reality" is no longer *true*. Our culture has departed from a shared true reality - to interpretations of it.

In the era of bias-affirming algorithms curated for our mental imprisonment, we lose sight of reality. We can't see anymore - and worse, we can't

see that we can't see. We have lost sight of sight.

The "we" is all of us, including me. Where we used to see humans, now we see fragmented, siloed, and weaponised datapoints: man, woman, black, white, light skin, black skin, educated, uneducated, right-wing, left-wing, poor, and rich.

We have forgotten that above all else: we are humans.

The loss of reality benefits those with malevolent intentions. Those who sacrifice human peace, survival, prosperity for short term gains: views, money, and power. And those with power to limit the death of sight, are reluctant, as they benefit from the status quo.

Therefore, we have an epistemological responsibility, as individuals, to remind ourselves of reality. Of confirmed truths.

I hope this books serves as that reminder.

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ONE
This is it.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom – Psalm 90 verse 12 [King James Version]

I used to think I was on my way to something—some destination where I'd finally feel complete, where things would settle and make sense, and life, as I envisioned it, would begin. I was a *future addict*, living in the pursuit of a better, perfected version of myself. In my mind, life was always a little farther down the road, just beyond the next achievement, promotion, or next city I would call home. I was the ultimate optimist, devoted to the idea of what could be.

But now, as I watch the people around me settling into their lives—getting married, raising kids, buying houses—I've come to a simple, startling realization: this is it. This life, this

moment, these days unfolding with their small routines and occasional surprises—this is all there is. There is no alternate reality where life begins in earnest, no grand transformation waiting to rescue me from today's imperfections. If I don't embrace what's here right now, I may find myself someday staring at a life I never really lived.

It's easy to become enchanted by the allure of tomorrow, by the idea that everything will somehow fall into place, that I will somehow fall into place. I told myself that once I achieved this, or became that, or solved this flaw, then I'd be ready to actually live. But what happens when the life you were preparing for never arrives? When it turns out that "someday" is not a scheduled date but a hazy mirage that keeps moving with each step forward?

As I get older, I realize I've been short-changing myself by placing so much of my energy in the future, by living for the "me" that I hoped to become. I look back now and see moments that I didn't fully savour because I was so wrapped up in what was next. The unfinished goals, the deferred dreams, the endless personal improvements—all of it took up precious space in my mind, edging out the present with relentless insistence. The irony is that even now, I'm still tempted to defer, to improve, to wait for some mythical future self to emerge. But this habit has a cost: I may become

someone who always looked forward and never really looked around.

There's a social weight that comes with this, too, especially as friends settle into their own lives. The timelines we share in youth start to diverge: some get married, have children, root themselves in particular places, while others are still searching, still reaching for whatever comes next. It's easy to feel lost, to wonder if maybe everyone else has found the "it" I'm still searching for. But the truth, I suspect, is that the big secret everyone learns eventually is that this is it. There is no magical future where life becomes uncomplicated, no event that will suddenly make us feel finished or fulfilled. There is only the ongoing, often messy, business of living.

This isn't to say that dreams and goals don't matter; they do. Hope matters. Ambition matters. But they can't be everything. If I were to die today, people would talk about who I am, not who I hoped to become. They'd talk about the life I've lived, not the life I planned to live. In the end, it's not the dreams we have but the days we live that define us. Our goals might inspire us, but it's the daily, often ordinary moments that leave the real mark, the stuff that people remember long after we're gone.

The hardest part of embracing this idea is

realizing that there's no miracle future where everything will finally feel right. Life isn't waiting for us in some perfected version of the future; it's happening now, in all its uncertainty and imperfection. It's here, in the people we love, the moments we cherish, the routines we repeat. What we do each day builds our future far more reliably than any grand aspiration. The idea of a perfect someday can become a prison if we let it, keeping us trapped in a cycle of endless preparation for a life we may never live.

So, what's left, then? Living here, in this moment, with whatever we have. Relishing the laughter of friends, the warmth of a sunrise, the satisfaction of completing a task, the quiet moments of solitude. It's about letting go of the need to "become" someone else and choosing to be who we are, now. The future isn't coming to save us; it's arriving every second in the choices we make, in the lives we lead, and in the people we become, day by day.

It's a terrifying thought—that maybe this is as good as it gets, that maybe life isn't a prologue to something bigger but the main event, unfolding as we speak. And yet, there's a strange comfort in it, too. I don't have to wait to be happy. I don't have to wait to feel fulfilled. This life, as imperfect and incomplete as it is, is enough.

In the end, this isn't about giving up on dreams or settling for less; it's about understanding that dreams are only one part of the whole. Life is built on the accumulation of today's details, today's small victories and quiet satisfactions, and these, in turn, create the future we're so eager to reach. By focusing only on what lies ahead, I risk losing the richness of what's right here.

So maybe I'm still a dreamer, but I want to be a dreamer who lives in the present, too. I want to embrace the imperfect, unspectacular now. To live a life that I'd be proud to leave behind, not because I achieved everything I wanted, but because I lived each day with attention and intention. Because if this is it—and it might just be—it's worth everything I've got.

TWO
No-one will remember.

When I was sixteen, I won a great victory. I felt in that moment I would live to be a hundred. Now I know I shall not see thirty. None of us know our end, really, or what hand will guide us there. A king may move a man, a father may claim a son, but that man can also move himself, and only then does that man truly begin his own game. Remember that howsoever you are played or by whom, your soul is in your keeping alone, even though those who presume to play you be kings or men of power. When you stand before God, you cannot say, "But I was told by others to do thus," or that virtue was not convenient at the time. This will not suffice. Remember that. ~ King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem, from the movie Kingdom of Heaven (Director's Cut)

Some years ago, on the 6th of September, Robert Mugabe, once president of Zimbabwe, passed from this world. Five years later, as I write this, there are no trending posts, no hashtags, no mourners, and no celebrations about the man. The man who ruled with an iron grip, hailed as both liberator and oppressor, has drifted, surprisingly quietly, into memory's ether. History doesn't linger

as long as we think, even for the most powerful figures.

And then there's you. You are not a president, not a figurehead of a nation; perhaps you're known to your friends, maybe even respected in your professional circle, but if we're honest, how many beyond them know you're alive, let alone would mark your passing? If the world has forgotten a man like Mugabe in a matter of years, it's fair to say it won't keep you in its memory for long.

It's strange, then, that so many of us live in the shadow of others' opinions, bearing the weight of the world's judgment as if it's etched in stone. We hesitate to write that novel, stage that play, take that leap into a career that thrills us. We fear to cut off toxic connections or to let the right people in, forever glancing over our shoulders at society's faceless authority. And yet, when our time finally comes to pass, the society that feels so omnipresent, so important in every moment of our lives, will barely notice we're gone. In truth, people—no matter how close—move on quickly. This is a painful fact, but maybe it's a liberating one, too.

Society, as we refer to it, is a sprawling thing, encompassing everyone from friends and family to bosses, teachers, and figures in power. Society is made up of those who shape us, who judge us,

who lift us up or bring us down. They're the ones whose opinions keep us shackled to a version of ourselves we outgrew years ago. Yet society isn't a single voice, nor a set of lasting values. It's a shifting, fluid creature that ebbs and flows with time. Just as today's heroes fade, so do today's whispers of doubt or disapproval. And tomorrow, those opinions won't mean much at all.

So why do we live as if they will? Why do we let our dreams shrink to fit in the shadows of expectations, most of which aren't even our own? It's astounding the number of us who let others' perceptions direct the path of our lives, making choices that appease the vague yet powerful "them," instead of taking hold of what we really want. We fear their criticism, their jealousy, their disappointment, all the while forgetting that these very people are, like us, transient. The voices that loom so large in our minds today will someday fall silent; they, too, will be forgotten.

Imagine, then, that it's the end of your days, and you're looking back. The achievements and failures, the moments of bravery and fear—all of it unspools before you. Will you regret not pushing past society's expectations? Will you wish you'd gone for that degree, that new city, that bold career shift? How many dreams, small or grand, did you let slip away because of what someone else might think? In that moment, on the verge of leaving all

those judgments behind, you will see how much of life was lost to the illusion of others' opinions.

Live as if you could actually do what you want. Live as if the world is merely an audience to your choices and nothing more. Mugabe is a potent reminder that even the most infamous, the most powerful are forgotten. So let that freedom sink in. Write the book, paint the picture, quit the stifling job, move across the country if that's where you feel drawn to go. Make your choices because they are yours, because the only one who will carry the weight of them in the end is you.

Of course, we're not alone in the world; we owe something to the people around us. But owing something is not the same as living by their expectations. Our family, friends, teachers, neighbours—they'll have opinions about how we live, but they won't be the ones to live it. The dreams you let go of, the words you leave unspoken, the experiences you don't have—they stay with you, lodged somewhere within, growing heavier as time passes.

And for what? You don't owe society an explanation for doing what you love. You don't owe an apology for setting boundaries or choosing peace over social obligations. This isn't selfishness, it's self-respect. You deserve to live fully, to build the life that feels authentic to you, because no one

will remember all the sacrifices you made to fit into a version of yourself that wasn't real. People's opinions are fleeting; the life you live is not.

Ultimately, the world is too vast, too busy, and too preoccupied with itself to stay invested in the minutiae of our choices. So why waste your life with fear of their judgment? Why wait, hoping for their approval, when they won't be there when it really matters? The only question that remains is whether you'll look back, someday, and wish you had lived differently. And if that's the question that matters, then maybe now is the time to start answering it with actions, rather than worries.

In the end, this is your life. Make it beautiful. Make it worthwhile, and make it yours. Let the world think what it wants, for a while. Soon, it won't be thinking of you at all: so, live.

THREE
Imaginary people.

The assumption of good faith is dead. What matters is not goodness but the appearance of goodness. We are no longer human beings. We are now angels jostling to out-angel one another. – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

For a fairly long time in human existence, we knew that people—our family, friends, and neighbours—were flawed. We wished they would become better, but we accepted them, missed them, and loved them. Even when they died, we refused to speak ill of them, embracing the Shona concept of *wafa wanaka*—"at death, all is beautiful."

And then something happened. Media began projecting perfect humans on screen—flawless, eloquent, and unerring in their morality. This new standard, so different from the messiness of real life, was amplified by mass pop psychology, which

gave us a new language to dissect human behaviour: "red flags," "green flags," "toxicity," "triggers." Pop astrology and spiritual movements added their own prescriptions for how we should be, speaking of chakras, karma, and the law of attraction.

We went from living among "ordinary people," as John Legend puts it, to aspiring to perfect human beings who demanded perfection from each other. Now, as these perfect beings, we expect everyone around us to say the right word at the right time, to act precisely as we wish in every situation.

The result is a strange new world. I, the individual, have become the master and lord of my world. And for others to live and breathe in my world, they have to meet my expectations of perfection. If a friend can't provide emotional or financial presence when I need it, they are no longer just unavailable; they are a "fake friend," a "snake." When someone voices a negative opinion about an individual, we label them a bigot—hating not just that one person but everyone who shares their trait. Racist, misogynist, sexist: the labels come quickly and leave no room for nuance.

This culture of judgment feeds into what I call toxic spireligious (spiritual + religious) positivity. It tells us that everything in our lives—every

success and every failure—is something we attracted with our minds. It insists we should always remain positive, regardless of our circumstances. "Love," "light," and "grace" are stripped of their meaning and reduced to platitudes, scattered liberally alongside sunflower emojis. Meanwhile, goals have grown to overshadow relationships, reshaping what we value in life.

Today, even minor disagreements can end friendships. Friends who once argued passionately but reconciled now see their differences as irreconcilable. Everyone is the main actor in their own carefully woven narrative, and those around them are merely supporting cast—discarded without a second thought if they offend or disappoint the protagonist.

Our public lives reflect the same brittleness. People lose their jobs over offhand remarks made in jest. Cancel culture punishes mistakes with unrelenting severity, often leaving no room for apology or redemption. Online, we've reclaimed "violence" as a fun way to describe harsh truths, but in reality, this so-called "violence" is just that—violence. Our memes denigrate others, and we celebrate the cruelty as wit, as if cutting someone down were a victory.

Yet for all this focus on perfection, the truth

remains: this "perfect human" we aspire to be, and demand others to become, is imaginary.

This relentless pursuit of perfection leaves us deeply disconnected. Alone. Lonely. We see others with suspicion rather than warmth. Communities splinter, and we are left without the support networks we once took for granted. Worse still, new communities often coalesce around hatred rather than shared humanity. Misandrist and misogynist ideologies flourish in meme culture, podcasts, and self-proclaimed gurus, feeding off a culture that thrives on division rather than connection.

We need to reclaim our humanity. We need to remember that we are not apart but a part. We are not "the one," but "a one." One people.

This begins with going easy on ourselves—and others. We need to accept and love our "druncles" (drunk uncles), even if they sometimes embarrass us. People are shaped by different cultures and upbringings, and we must learn to forgive their prejudices. This doesn't mean condoning bigotry; it means recognizing that beneath the surface, they are still people—and still lovable.

Forgiveness is the foundation of this reclamation. We must forgive the flaws in others as we forgive them in ourselves, knowing that

none of us are finished products. Everything we do, at its core, should aim to improve life—for humanity and the environment—not serve individual selfishness.

It is in this ordinariness that we find true connection. When we let go of the need for perfection, we rediscover what it means to be human. Relationships cease to be transactions; communities cease to be conditional. We begin to value people not for their utility, but for their presence.

This is not a call to lower our standards or excuse harmful behaviour. It is a call to remember that our humanity is defined not by how flawlessly we perform, but by how generously we love, how deeply we forgive, and how willingly we embrace the messy, imperfect people around us.

In the end, the goal isn't to become perfect. It is to recognize the beauty of imperfection and to build a world where we can all thrive—not in spite of our flaws, but because of our shared humanity.

Most importantly, we must accept that we are not perfect. We are just ordinary people.

FOUR
We are animals.

We are just an advanced breed of monkeys on a minor planet of a very average star. But we can understand the universe. That makes us something very special. – Stephen Hawking

Humans have a peculiar tendency: we forget what we are. Not who we are, but what. The idea that humans are animals — biological, psychological, and emotional beings like any other creatures on this planet—has become a distant notion, buried under layers of cultural narratives, religious teachings, and modern philosophies that insist on our exceptionalism. Yet the truth remains. Strip away the complexities of civilization, and we are left with a simple reality: humans are animals. This fundamental fact shapes our behaviour, drives our decisions, and underpins the systems we create to manage ourselves. Forgetting it comes at great cost.

What sets humans apart is not our detachment from the animal kingdom but our ability to build upon our instincts. We are intelligent animals with the gift of complex speech. These two traits have allowed us to organize in unprecedented ways, creating countries, currencies, religions, and art. We've harnessed fire, split atoms, and mapped the stars. But none of this negates the fact that, at our core, we are still animals. The refusal to acknowledge this has created distortions in how we view ourselves, our societies, and our place in the natural world.

For centuries, culture has nudged us to forget our animal roots. Religion often declares humans to be divinely ordained beings, separate from and superior to all other creatures. Pop psychology feeds the myth of human exceptionalism, portraying us as unique, rational entities capable of overcoming the limitations of biology. New Age movements declare humanity to be spiritually evolved, far removed from the primal instincts that govern "lesser" beings. These narratives have fostered an illusion that human-made constructs—money, laws, nations—are as real and unchanging as gravity.

The result is a society that sacrifices lives on the altar of imagined realities. Entire civilizations have been built on abstract concepts like gold-backed currencies or divine mandates, leading to wars,

oppression, and environmental degradation. These constructs, while useful, are not fundamental truths. They are products of animal ingenuity. Remembering our place in the natural order grounds us, allowing us to create systems that reflect both our potential and our limitations.

Accepting that humans are animals is not a step backward. It is an act of clarity that can reshape how we approach governance, medicine, religion, and innovation. This acknowledgment encourages pragmatism, allowing us to design systems that protect us from our own worst instincts.

Democracy's brilliance lies not in its appeal to our noblest qualities but in its management of our basest tendencies. Humans, like all animals, are territorial and hierarchical. Left unchecked, we resort to violence to seize power, enrich ourselves, and crush opposition. Democracy addresses this by imposing term limits, separating powers, and guaranteeing inalienable rights. It assumes our leaders are fallible and builds safeguards against tyranny.

When societies forget that humans are animals, they fall prey to authoritarianism cloaked in divine right or revolutionary zeal. Leaders claim to hear from God or to embody the will of the people, justifying absolute power. A clear-eyed view of our nature reveals the dangers of unchecked authority

and reinforces the need for governance that prioritizes balance over perfection.

Medicine succeeds because it recognizes humans as mortal biological creatures. Our bodies function like those of other animals, subject to disease, decay, and natural processes. When we view ourselves as something more than animals, we risk abandoning science for superstition. Anti-vaccine movements and faith healing emerge from a refusal to accept our biological reality.

Even in mental health, this disconnect is evident. When a dog is depressed, we examine its environment, looking for stressors or unmet needs. Yet, when humans suffer, we often default to narratives of individual failure or chemical imbalance. Treating humans as animals requires a holistic approach, addressing not only biology but also the environments we create.

Religion serves two vital functions: providing comfort and promoting social harmony. It helps people cope with mortality and offers moral frameworks for coexistence. However, when taken as absolute truth, religion fosters fundamentalism, leading to division and violence.

A pragmatic approach to religion focuses on its practical benefits. Emphasizing character building and communal harmony, religion can shed its

dogmatic baggage. People need not fight over the "correct" way to worship or impose their beliefs on others. Instead, religion becomes a tool for improving human life, not a weapon of division.

Every human invention extends our abilities as animals. Phones enhance communication; vehicles extend mobility; medicine prolongs life. These innovations reflect our instinct to adapt and survive. Yet modern entrepreneurship often strays from this purpose, prioritizing prestige or profit over practicality.

Understanding ourselves as animals re-centres innovation on utility. The goal becomes clear: create tools that address human needs—communication, transportation, housing, energy, and food. Romanticized entrepreneurship, with its focus on flashy, impractical ideas, gives way to a culture of genuine problem-solving.

Humans are not separate from nature; we are part of it. The biosphere sustains us as much as any other species. Forgetting this has led to environmental destruction, as we treat nature as an expendable resource rather than a shared home.

Recognizing our animal nature reminds us of our dependence on ecosystems. We are fauna, living alongside flora, and our survival hinges on the health of the planet. Environmental

stewardship becomes a matter of self-preservation, not altruism.

Understanding humans as animals also clarifies our social structures. Like many species, humans display sexual dimorphism and behavioural differences between males and females.

Modern capitalist culture, with its emphasis on competition and wealth, often rewards traditionally masculine traits, leaving women to navigate a system that demands conformity to male norms. Recognizing these differences allows us to design more inclusive systems. Fair and equitable workplaces can accommodate diverse needs without erasing biological realities.

Similarly, observing the natural occurrence of alternative relationships and gender behaviours in other species affirms the normalcy of such identities in humans. Protecting minority rights becomes a matter of respecting nature, not defying it.

Acknowledging that humans are animals does not diminish our achievements. It enhances our understanding of what makes those achievements remarkable. Accepting our biological and psychological realities allows us to build systems that reflect who we are, rather than who we wish to be. It grounds us in the pragmatism needed to

address modern challenges, from governance to environmental sustainability.

The denial of our animal nature has led to countless missteps. Wars fought over imaginary lines, lives sacrificed to abstract ideologies, and ecosystems destroyed in the name of progress—all stem from the belief that humans are exceptional beings, untethered from nature. Reclaiming our place as animals, no more and no less, offers a path to clarity and balance.

In remembering that we are animals, we do not diminish our humanity. We illuminate it.

FIVE
The disease is the symptom.

If you simply cannot understand why someone is grieving so much for so long, then consider yourself fortunate that you do not understand.
- Joann Cacciatore

In the modern era, we often discuss depression as if it were a disease – a chemical imbalance in the brain that we can medicate and dismiss. But this perspective misses the broader and more unsettling truth: depression is not a disease per se. Rather, it is a symptom of a larger, systemic disease. The roots of this condition lie in the way our society is structured. We are living in a system that breeds disconnection, instability, and despair, which collectively result in what we call "depression."

Depression rates have soared over recent

decades. A World Health Organization study showed that depression is now a leading cause of disability worldwide, affecting nearly 5% of adults. Yet, compare these statistics with those from, say, the 1960s or earlier, when rates were lower and the idea of clinical depression was less widespread. This is not because people back then were immune to sadness or suffering, but because the structural factors in society that lead to depression had not yet reached the fever pitch we see today.

The relentless pursuit of economic growth has placed us all in a rat race, fostering a "keeping up with the Joneses" mentality that has eroded our sense of self-worth. The capitalist ethos promises us satisfaction if only we buy the next big thing or achieve the next status symbol. Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* highlights this constant push, arguing that our societal structure positions consumerism as a substitute for meaning. But the result is a population plagued by inadequacy and shame, fed by social media algorithms designed to intensify feelings of comparison and isolation.

Our social fabric has also frayed. Gone are the stable communities of past generations, replaced by transient urban lives that leave many feeling like strangers in their own neighbourhoods. Relationships are fleeting; job security is a relic of the past. The globalized economy has transformed most work into a series of temporary roles with

little stability or chance for meaningful career development. Without a foundation of stable relationships or work, we are stripped of a fundamental human need for belonging and purpose, echoing Viktor Frankl's insights in *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl argued that humans thrive only when they can find meaning in their lives. Today, however, that sense of meaning is in constant jeopardy.

Then there is the decline in organized religion, once a staple in providing purpose and moral grounding. While religion is not a universal panacea, it did offer a community structure and an overarching sense of life's purpose. With its decline, many have turned to consumerism, nationalism and supranationalism, or identity politics to fill the void – ideologies that are often divisive and far less nurturing than traditional community bonds.

Our response to depression as a symptom of these issues has largely been to prescribe medication. But while medication can be necessary, it is often a temporary fix for a deeper problem. Pills may help an individual to function in a fundamentally dysfunctional society, but they do not address the root causes that drive depression in the first place. The emphasis on pharmaceuticals as a primary solution treats the individual as if they are "broken" rather than

acknowledging that the environment they live in is often harmful and unsustainable.

If we are serious about addressing depression, we need to look beyond individual treatment and begin reforming the structures that lead to despair. This means promoting sustainable living conditions, re-establishing community ties, and developing economic and social policies that value human well-being over profit. Instead of normalizing the idea that individuals need to be medicated to cope with modern life, we should prioritize creating a society where people do not feel this level of disillusionment in the first place.

We cannot continue to sideline depression as a purely medical issue; it is a social issue that demands social solutions. Pharmaceutical intervention may be necessary as a short-term lifeline, but ultimately, the cure lies in reforming the world we live in, not just in treating the symptoms.

SIX
Everything affects everything.

"For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." – Matthew 25 verse 29 [King James Version]

At the core of life's inequalities lies an undeniable truth: where, when, and to whom you are born shapes your entire existence. From the moment you take your first breath, the odds of success, stability, and happiness are already stacked against or in your favour. Birth, it turns out, is the most significant lottery we ever face—the roll of the dice that will shape every decision and opportunity thereafter.

We can strive to change our circumstances, to overcome barriers, but for most of us, the starting point of our lives is the result of an arbitrary act of

fate. Our health, our education, our career prospects, our relationships, and even our perceptions of self-worth are all intricately woven into the circumstances of our birth.

This realization, while humbling, is essential to understanding how deeply everything affects everything. When we acknowledge the role of birth in our trajectory, we begin to see that personal success and failure are not merely the results of individual actions but are often the cumulative effects of forces far beyond our control.

Consider physical, social, and psychological health, the very foundation of our existence. The state of our bodies and minds is shaped by the conditions in which we are born. Access to healthcare, sanitation, and nutrition—critical elements that influence our physical well-being—are not determined by our individual efforts. They are determined by the environments we are born into.

If you are born in a developed country, you will likely grow up with access to basic healthcare, clean water, and nutritious food. These conditions promote good health, which in turn fosters well-being and longevity. In contrast, if you are born into a region with limited access to these essential resources, the likelihood of experiencing chronic illness or mental health issues increases

dramatically. This disparity does not reflect personal choice but rather the arbitrary nature of where and when you were born.

The same principle applies to your social standing and the network of relationships that form your life. The people we are born to and the social environment in which we are raised determine our connections, opportunities, and chances of advancement. If you are born into a wealthy family with a wide network of influential people, you are more likely to be introduced to the right people at the right time, accelerating your opportunities for success. You may not even have to work particularly hard to secure a place in the social hierarchy. Conversely, if you are born into a marginalized or impoverished community, the social capital at your disposal is far more limited. Opportunities may pass you by not because of a lack of talent or ambition but because of the networks, or lack thereof, that shape your access to the world.

This same dynamic extends to the skills we develop. We often think of skills as innate qualities that are shaped by our own efforts—things we can hone through hard work and perseverance. However, the value of those skills is determined by the place and time in which we live. The skill of being a good public speaker, for example, can be an asset in a democratic society that values

persuasion and communication. But in a society where free speech is restricted or where public speaking is not esteemed, this skill may hold little to no value. The skill of farming might have been considered highly valuable in an agrarian society, but in a modern, technology-driven world, the same skill might be seen as obsolete or underappreciated. Being born with certain talents or abilities only matters if those skills are aligned with the demands of the time and place you inhabit.

This reality extends further to education. The level and quality of education we receive is not just a matter of personal choice or determination; it is largely influenced by where we are born. If you are born into a family that values education and has the financial means to invest in your schooling, your educational experience will likely be of a higher standard, providing you with the tools you need to succeed in a competitive world. If you are born into a family that cannot afford to send you to school, or if the education system in your region is subpar, your chances of success diminish. For many, the lack of education becomes an inherited disadvantage, compounded across generations. Those who are born into poverty face a systemic struggle to climb the educational ladder, and without that crucial step, it is difficult to access higher-paying jobs, networks of opportunity, and a better quality of life.

Your job prospects, too, are shaped by your birth circumstances. The type of work you will do and the level of income you can expect to earn often depend more on your starting point than on your own drive or abilities. If you are born into an environment where work opportunities are abundant, where the economy is strong, and where social mobility is a realistic possibility, you are likely to enjoy a career that aligns with your interests and talents. But if you are born into a place with limited opportunities—perhaps a country with high unemployment, limited job training, or discriminatory hiring practices—your chances of landing a job that supports your aspirations are drastically reduced. Your access to wealth, stability, and success is often determined not by your skills or qualifications, but by the systemic forces that shape the job market and the opportunities within it.

Even more profound are the ways in which ethnicity, race, gender, and historical context shape our life experiences. The moment you are born, your identity is already ascribed to a category that will dictate much of your life. If you are born into a minority group, your race or ethnicity may become a barrier to success, access, and equality. History has shown that those born into marginalized communities—whether as a Jew in the 1940s or a Tutsi in the 1990s—have been

subject to persecution, violence, and social exclusion simply because of who they are. Birth in these circumstances does not merely shape one's material prospects but also determines how one will be seen and treated by others, sometimes with devastating consequences.

The birth lottery is the foundation upon which our entire lives are built. Those born with privilege—whether it is access to wealth, education, health, or social networks—compound that advantage throughout their lives, and often, across generations. Conversely, those born into disadvantage find that the challenges they face compound in similar ways. A child born into poverty faces more significant hurdles at every step of their journey, and this disadvantage is not easily overcome. The disparities between the two are not only personal but systemic, rooted in the structures of society that perpetuate these differences.

In light of this, it is important to reconsider how we view success and failure. When we see someone who is struggling, whether it's a person in poverty or someone caught in a cycle of bad decisions, it's easy to reduce their plight to individual failure. But we must remember that success or failure is rarely purely personal. It is shaped by the dice roll of birth. Understanding this does not excuse harmful behaviours, but it does allow us to approach people and their struggles with greater empathy

and insight. When we see someone living in the margins, we should ask not just "What went wrong?" but "What forces were at play, and when?" This shift in perspective doesn't necessarily solve the problems, but it encourages a more compassionate and nuanced understanding of what it means to succeed or fail.

The moral of the story is simple: everything affects everything. Our choices, our circumstances, and the systems we navigate are shaped by forces beyond our control. Recognizing this truth allows us to see people more clearly—not just as individuals making choices, but as products of their environments, their histories, and the legacies they inherit.

The next time you see someone, whether they are thriving or struggling, remember that their life is not solely a result of their own actions. Everything they have, and everything they lack, is connected to a larger web of forces, many of which they never chose. In understanding this, we can be more empathetic, more aware, and perhaps even more determined to change the systems that perpetuate inequality. Because, ultimately, everything affects everything.

SEVEN
Embracing average.

I was gonna call it "Another Nigga," but it ain't really a poem. I just felt like it's something you probably could relate to. – Kendrick Lamar

There have been over 100 billion people who have lived since the inception of humanity. A little more than that number who have been born, accounting for infant mortality and infanticides. Of all those billions of people, at most only 10 million can be considered globally remarkable or significant. These are the men and women of infamy who have moved the world from zero to one: inventors, leaders, religious figures, movie stars, dictators, conmen, and so on. That's at most 0.01% of the people who have ever walked the Earth. That's the size of the "remarkable" pool.

Yet, success in our culture is predicated on the idea that you must become part of that 0.01%.

From kindergarten, we are told, “You are special,” “You are amazing,” “You are a star.” But that idea has become a relentless force that pushes us to chase the impossible. It tells us that we are supposed to stand out, be extraordinary, be one of the few who makes it. That’s the dream.

But look around. The reality is that billions of people are currently living in poverty. Only a tiny fraction of humanity has more than $1,000 saved. Yet, we are constantly told to look to the exceptional, to the 0.01%, as though they are the norm, as though they should be the model to aspire to. It’s the cultural machine that teaches us that we must become the outlier to matter.

Think about it: rags-to-riches stories are only inspiring because they are rare. For every person born in poverty who manages to escape it, there are hundreds of millions who do not. Rags to riches is the exception, not the rule. If it were the rule, it wouldn’t be a compelling story. But because it’s so rare, it’s turned into the blueprint for success.

This is where we hit a dead end. We live in a "dream economy," where the poor and disenfranchised are kept hopeful with the illusion that, despite all odds, they could be the next success story. It’s a hope that, while powerful, is also deeply flawed. This narrative breeds a

cognitive dissonance that leads people into midlife crises, the sobering moment when they realize they've been living for the future—a future that never arrived. They realize, too late, that the life they had been living was the life, and they should not have been postponing their happiness in the name of some far-off, magical future.

So, they attempt to recover this lost "*postponed present*." This is when people start acquiring things and behaviours they think are for younger people—buying things that seem like they belong to another time, trying to relive a moment that has already passed.

I digress, but the point stands.

Our culture is broken in this sense: we ask people to strive for the impossible. We ask people to be the next Mandela, the next Bill Gates, the next Michael Jackson. We place them on impossible pedestals and then act surprised when they fall short or, worse, become consumed by the pressure of such expectations.

Instead of aiming for infamy or global recognition, we should be aiming for a life well lived. A life where we do our best for ourselves and for the environment around us, today, here, in the present moment. The shift needs to happen away from the idea that only the remarkable are worthy,

and towards the realization that a life well lived is, in itself, a noble pursuit.

We need to embrace the average life.

Now, let's be clear: average is not mediocrity. Average is not settling. Average is not failure. Average is fulfilment. Average is living in a way that you can look back and say you've done well. You've contributed. You've been consistent. You've made the world around you a little better.

Average is living a good life in a way that makes your world, your people, and your environment better off than you found them. Average means having relationships that matter, staying healthy, building a life that's sustainable for yourself and the people around you. Average means looking at your work and being proud of it because you did your best, not because it was extraordinary.

The truth is that the majority of us will be unremarkable. We will never be on the cover of magazines. We will never receive global accolades or be immortalized in history books. But that doesn't mean we cannot be fulfilled. That doesn't mean our lives can't matter. It doesn't mean we can't make a difference, even if it's only within our own immediate circles.

We've been fed a story that only the exceptional

are worth celebrating, but it's time to rethink what success really is. Success is not about reaching the unreachable, but about being present, doing what you can, where you are, with what you have. It's about finding meaning in the day-to-day, in the moments that matter to you and the people you love.

The culture of ambition we've created isn't just unrealistic; it's damaging. It robs us of the joy of living for now and places all our hope in an unreachable tomorrow. It tells us that unless we are outliers, unless we reach the highest peaks, our lives are somehow less valuable. That is a lie.

So, let's recalibrate. Let's give up the idea that we have to be the next big thing. Let's stop striving for the 0.01%. Let's aim for something simpler, something quieter, but infinitely more fulfilling: a life well lived. Let's embrace the idea that we don't need to be famous to be happy, and we don't need to change the world to make it better.

The truth is, the vast majority of us will never be the next Mandela or Gates. And that's fine. What matters is the life we live, right here, right now. And that, in itself, is enough.

EIGHT
The way of the ~~superior~~ healthy man.

The greater jihad (struggle) is to battle your own soul, to fight the evil within yourself — Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him)

We live in a time when the complexities surrounding gender are heightened, and the figure of man has, more often than not, been scrutinized and vilified. Men, as a gender, are under attack. Feminist campaigns, which are necessary and justified in many respects, have taken an especially fierce stance against the actions of men, with slogans like "men are trash" catching fire on social media.

And, let's be clear: when women talk about the violence, the oppression, the exclusion, and the systemic subjugation they experience at the hands of men—when they recount the rampant abuse,

the trafficking, the murders, the exploitation—we cannot deny the validity of their lived experiences. The evil men have perpetrated, and continue to perpetrate, is not only real, it's horrific. And this is important to acknowledge.

However, there's a darker, unspoken reality that comes with this one-sided critique. The message—though necessary—has not been balanced. In fact, the condemnation has been so absolute, and so pervasive, that it has left the modern man feeling hopeless, adrift, and unsure of where he belongs in this world. Men today are often told they are the source of all societal ills: violence, misogyny, inequality. The image of the man as an inherently flawed and dangerous creature has been all but solidified.

What this has done is create a vacuum. And in the absence of a healthy, balanced narrative, extremist figures have risen to fill it. These new "alpha male" figures, who rail against the emasculation of men and preach a doctrine of dominance, have found a willing audience. They offer a seductive response to the misandrist discourse: become stronger, become tougher, become more successful than women, rise above them. They point to examples like women who turn to sex work or who take part in transactional relationships with men as an embodiment of the supposed moral decay of modern womanhood.

They assert that these women are the very definition of femininity, and thus their behaviour must be mirrored and even surpassed. In this warped view, the so-called "alpha male" can dominate and assert his superiority by objectifying women, reducing them to tools for male pleasure, profit, and status.

It's a dangerous cycle. The "alpha male" mentality takes root because it feeds off anger and resentment. It teaches men that their worth is not based on kindness, love, or empathy, but on power—on a rigid and outdated notion of what it means to be masculine. This so-called masculinity is defined by strength, wealth, and the ability to control others, particularly women. What results is a generation of men who worship money, disdain vulnerability, and see rising to the top of society as their birthright. The problem with this mindset is not just that it is toxic for women, but it's also deeply damaging for the men themselves.

We need to acknowledge this toxic masculinity for what it is: a reaction, a symptom of the larger, unaddressed issue—the overwhelming vilification of men without the room for healthy discussion, growth, or understanding. The misandrist rhetoric has created an environment where men feel as though they are being attacked, and in response, they build their own defences that are just as harmful. These "alpha male" ideologies, often

spread through self-styled gurus, influencers, and digital "universities," are designed to fuel frustration, alienation, and hate. They teach men to fight, to conquer, and to dominate. In doing so, they erase the emotional and psychological well-being of men—reducing them to caricatures of what they think they should be, not who they truly are.

The problem, of course, is twofold: it is not just women who are objectified by this culture, it's men too. The pressure to conform to an exaggerated version of masculinity leads men to internalize harmful norms about strength, control, and success. This creates a situation where men are forced to live up to a myth, a standard that not only robs them of their humanity but also damages their relationships with women, with themselves, and ultimately, with the world. These men, who were once boys full of promise, creativity, and emotional depth, are now left struggling to cope in a world that tells them that vulnerability is weakness, empathy is a flaw, and emotional depth is anathema to the man they're supposed to become.

We need men who are strong in different ways. We need men who are healthy—both mentally and physically. We need men who see themselves as capable of contributing positively to the world, and who view their fellow humans, regardless of

gender, as equals. These men should understand that true strength comes not from domination, but from respect and cooperation. They should not see women as mere objects to fulfil a role, but as human beings with the same rights, agency, and dignity that they themselves possess. The relationship between men and women should be one of mutual respect, where both are free to pursue their goals, dreams, and aspirations, without being limited by non-useful gender roles.

In the world of healthy men, men would not see women as object functions to be fulfilled—whether it's cooking, sex, or emotional labour—but as people with their own autonomy and the right to choose how they live. Positive masculinity is about moving beyond the tired narrative of dominance and submission. It is about recognizing that to be truly "alpha" is not to control others, but to master oneself. It is not to live by the rules of an outdated gender hierarchy, but to live in harmony with others, striving for collective growth, kindness, and understanding.

This doesn't mean that men should abandon their ambition, their drive, or their competitiveness. Far from it. These are essential qualities that can be harnessed for good. But ambition should not be about crushing others beneath your feet; it should be about lifting others up. True leadership is about guiding, not

dominating. True power is about influence, not control. And respect, always, is mutual.

The reality is, men will continue to be vilified by some sectors of society. The rhetoric of misandry will not die easily. But this isn't an excuse for men to become just as damaging, just as vengeful, or just as divisive. The extreme "alpha male" mentality is no more the answer than the extreme misandrist critique of men. Both are reductive, one-dimensional views of gender and human nature. And both ultimately harm not just women, but men as well.

What we need is a generation of men who seek happiness, not revenge; who want to improve themselves and their environment, not tear down others. We need men who see the humanity in women and men, in all people, and who treat them with respect. And more than anything, we need men who can look at themselves in the mirror and feel good about who they are—not because they've dominated anyone, but because they've been kind, thoughtful, and willing to evolve.

The future of masculinity lies in recognizing the inherent dignity of all people—recognizing that we are not in competition with one another, but part of a shared journey. Only by rejecting the extremes, the objectification, and the toxic ideologies on both sides can we create a healthier,

more positive world for everyone.

The path to positive masculinity is not about rising above anyone else, but rising alongside them.

NINE
Is there personal space left?

I am not what I think I am. I am not what you think I am. I am what I think you think I am. – Charles Cooley

In a world that seems to follow us everywhere we go, the concept of "personal space" is fading into the realm of nostalgia. Our bedrooms, once places of rest and retreat, have become extensions of the workplace, of our social lives, and even of society at large. Shared accommodations, open-plan offices, and constant social media exposure have put us in a state of hyper-awareness.

We are never alone, not even in our own heads.

As young people, we are told that we are the most connected generation in history. With a few taps, we can speak to someone halfway across the

world, or jump into a work meeting from the comfort of our beds. But these perks come with an unspoken cost: we have lost the luxury of space to simply be. We move through a world where the walls are thinning, and where, it seems, privacy is an antique—prized and sought after, but almost impossible to secure.

Imagine coming home after a long day, eager to unwind, only to find your housemate sprawled across the living room, headphones in, muttering lines to some movie. You retreat to your room, but there it's the same story. Your phone pings with notifications. Instagram beckons with a carousel of perfectly filtered lives. Facebook sends reminders of old friendships. Your inbox is crowded with promotions, unread messages from your boss, event invites from friends. Even in the four walls of your own bedroom, it's impossible to escape the digital crowd.

There was a time when people could vanish for a few hours without worrying. But in an age where being unreachable has turned into a quiet rebellion, going off the grid, even briefly, feels like a radical act. Texts are left hanging, unresponsive. Social media accounts appear deserted. The unanswered email becomes an act of defiance. The only problem is, we know the world is watching. When the expectation is to always be "on," stepping out of the spotlight creates a new kind of anxiety: the

fear of missing out on our own lives. We are haunted by the spectre of events, conversations, and information unfolding without us, as though our absence might somehow render us obsolete.

The modern workplace reflects this omnipresence. In many cities, the once-ubiquitous office cubicle is being replaced by the open-plan office. Desks are clustered, devoid of walls or barriers, with bosses milling around, teams grouped like colonies, discussing their next big idea. The open office encourages collaboration, or so we're told. But for many, it simply means fewer places to hide. There is no corner, no door to shut out the hum of keyboards, the clinking of mugs, the endless chatter. It's as if productivity and privacy have been pitted against each other, with the scales tipping hard against those who seek quiet moments of solitude.

But it isn't only the open office that has changed how we occupy space. Even the journey to and from work no longer offers a refuge. Carpooling, public transport—all seemingly benign options on the surface—mean that one is constantly in the company of others. Your commute, once a buffer between the demands of work and the demands of home, has become another arena where we are expected to smile, nod, converse politely, and continue existing as part of a larger, never-pausing whole.

And then there's social media, which has reshaped how we experience solitude, filling our mental and emotional space to the brim. Alone in our rooms, we find ourselves scrolling, lurking, judging, and being judged. Friends from childhood resurface; celebrities beckon with updates; opinions from strangers entangle themselves in our thoughts. It's as though, wherever we go, the entire world goes with us—an infinite audience standing behind us, peering over our shoulders, silently monitoring, occasionally judging, rarely ever letting us forget that they are there. A generation ago, our bedrooms were places to unplug. Now, they are anything but.

This erosion of privacy has exacted a quiet toll. Studies show that anxiety among young people is at an all-time high, and experts are pointing to this constant exposure and lack of safe zones as a significant factor. Experts say that without time for solitude—real solitude, free from expectations—we lose the chance to reflect, to ground ourselves, to develop independently of the social mirror. We start to see ourselves through the eyes of others, rather than our own, and in doing so, we lose a fundamental part of who we are. Our identities are fragments, reflections pieced together from the pixels of others' opinions and expectations.

When did we last feel truly alone? When did we

last sit in a room, undistracted by screens, undisrupted by other people's noise? Solitude, once a natural state of being, is now a luxury. To sit in silence, to read, to listen to music, or even to do nothing at all—these simple acts are losing their place in our lives. We are out of practice with ourselves, and it shows. Many of us no longer know what it feels like to just be. The world's voices have become our own; the endless streaming opinions fill our heads, drowning out the quieter sound of self-reflection.

To be sure, none of these developments were necessarily designed with ill intent. Open-plan offices were heralded as spaces for collaboration and creativity. Social media promised connection and community. Carpooling reduces our carbon footprint. But with every inch we've sacrificed in the name of efficiency, productivity, and connectivity, we've relinquished the right to be left alone.

Perhaps the solution lies in reclaiming small spaces of solitude where we can find them. Maybe it's a few minutes of meditation in the morning, phone-free weekends, an hour-long walk in the evening with the phone on silent. Perhaps it means logging off for longer, unfollowing accounts that crowd our minds, or even embracing the quiet discomfort of time spent in one's own company. It may be difficult, but it might be our last hope of

finding ourselves amidst a life that no longer grants us privacy.

Ultimately, our sense of self cannot survive if it is always turned outward. We are running out of space, both physical and emotional, and if we do not act, we may reach a point of no return—a place where we have forgotten what it means to just be, to retreat within the safety of ourselves.

In the end, perhaps the most subversive act we can perform in our hyper-connected age is to disappear, if only for a moment.

TEN
Find the others.

Two are better than one. – Ecclesiastes 4 verse 12a [King James Version]

A lot of individual great people have done a lot of great things. Yet, when we reflect on these accomplishments, we often overlook the true foundation of their success: the people they did it with.

History is filled with remarkable individuals who have shaped the world, but rarely have any of these pioneers succeeded entirely on their own. The stories of innovation, revolution, and transformation are not only about the singular genius of the individuals leading them but also about the collective effort of those who joined them on their journey. The truth is, no one ever truly accomplishes greatness in isolation.

Our culture, unfortunately, celebrates the figure at the top—the founder, the visionary, the "genius." The spotlight shines brightly on the Steve Jobs, the Bill Gates, the Martin Luther Kings, the Robert Mugabes of the world. These figures have become icons, synonymous with the milestones they achieved, often presented as solitary forces that propelled their movements and industries forward. But the reality is that none of these figures would have succeeded without the support of others.

Steve Jobs had Steve Wozniak; Bill Gates had Paul Allen; Martin Luther King Jr. had a network of activists and organizers pushing the civil rights movement forward; Robert Mugabe, despite his controversial legacy, relied on the support of a other revolutionaries such as Dr. Joshua Nkomo in Zimbabwe.

Greatness, as it turns out, is rarely a solo endeavour. It's built on collaboration, teamwork, and shared vision.

As a result of the celebrated solo individuals, we are witnessing a generation of young people who, having consumed the biographies, documentaries, and TED Talks of these titans, are inspired to emulate their stories. The aspiration is real, the ambition palpable. Everywhere you look, young

people dream of becoming the leader, the founder, the first in their field. And why not? The idea of making a mark in the world is seductive. We are told that anything is possible, that individual determination and vision can alter the course of history. It's an inspiring narrative, but it's also incomplete. While the desire to lead and build is commendable, the belief that success can only be achieved through individual effort is a dangerous fallacy. The truth is, even the most remarkable of leaders rely on others. Alone, none of us can go far.

To move from zero to one, to transform an idea into something substantial, to launch a business, a political movement, or a social cause—it's simply not feasible without a partner. For any large-scale or long-term project to succeed, the idea of the lone genius falls apart. In fact, the notion of solitary achievement is more myth than reality. From the Great Zimbabwe to the Great Wall of China, from the Pyramids of Giza to the moon landing, the greatest accomplishments in human history have all been the result of teamwork. Communities, teams, and partners are the bedrock of meaningful work. It is impossible to create something monumental on your own.

We need others to build with us, to challenge us, to push us further than we can go alone.

The Great Zimbabwe, once a thriving centre of commerce and culture, was not the creation of a single ruler or architect. It was built over centuries by a community that shared a common purpose and vision. Similarly, the Great Wall of China was not erected by a lone emperor or warrior; it was the work of countless labourers, soldiers, and strategists working together to safeguard an empire. The Pyramids of Giza, one of the most awe-inspiring feats of engineering, were not the result of the effort of a single pharaoh. They were the product of thousands of workers—architects, engineers, slaves, and labourers—united by a vision. History's greatest achievements are almost always the result of a collective effort, a shared belief in a cause, and the willingness to work together despite differences and challenges.

In the modern world, this principle remains just as relevant. Whether in business, politics, or social movements, success is no longer a product of individual effort. To make a lasting impact, we need partners. We need teams, collaborators, and communities of like-minded individuals who share our values and ambitions. Whether you're starting a company, running a campaign, or trying to change the world, you cannot do it alone. In fact, trying to do it alone can be a recipe for failure. Building something meaningful requires more than just vision—it requires the input, effort, and support of others who complement and challenge

your own abilities.

For instance, consider the rise of modern tech companies. Few of the successful entrepreneurs of the digital age—whether it's Zuckerberg, or Bezos—could have accomplished their goals without the help of skilled teams. Mark Zuckerberg didn't create Facebook alone; he had Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes. Jeff Bezos didn't revolutionize online shopping without the hundreds of people who helped build Amazon from a humble startup to a global powerhouse. Each of these individuals is credited with founding or leading incredible enterprises, but they did so with others at their side.

No one can do it alone. It is the collective force of a group that turns a great idea into something tangible and lasting.

This is where the concept of finding "the others" becomes vital. As great as we think we are, as talented as we hope we are, and as visionary as we wish to be, we need partners. We need people who will complement our strengths, help us overcome our weaknesses, and push us to think bigger, work harder, and persevere through challenges. We need to build tribes—communities grounded in shared virtues and values—and we need to find the others to build with. Whether

they're business partners, political allies, or people who simply share a passion for a cause, they are the ones who will help us bring our dreams to fruition.

In the end, the idea of finding the others is not just about seeking help. It's about recognizing that the work we do, the things we create, and the impact we make are far richer when we do them together. Building something great is not a matter of individual talent alone. It's about collaboration, about finding those who share your vision and bring something to the table that you don't. Great achievements are not the work of isolated geniuses; they are the result of many people, each playing their part, each bringing their unique skills and perspectives to the table. The most successful movements in history have always been collective efforts, where individuals come together to create something larger than themselves.

So, as you think about the future, about your ambitions, and about the great things you wish to accomplish, remember that the road to success isn't walked alone. Find the others—the ones who will challenge you, support you, and help you achieve what you cannot do on your own. Together, you will create something far greater than any of you could have achieved alone. And that is where true greatness lies.

ELEVEN
Do the work.

The only thing that I see that is distinct about me is that I am not afraid to die on the treadmill. I will not be outworked. Period. You might have more money than me or be smarter than me – you may be all things better than me in nine categories – but if we get on a treadmill together, there are two things: either you will get off first, or I will die on that treadmill. It is really that simple. – Will Smith

When we see successful people in the limelight—whether they're on big stages, being interviewed on prime-time television, or receiving accolades in front of large crowds—we think to ourselves, "I could do that." It's a good reaction; it shows that we are inspired, that we see the potential in ourselves to achieve something similar.

There is nothing wrong with inspiration—it's what fuels ambition, drives progress, and pushes people to try something new. But the real problem arises when we mistake the applause, the awards,

and the public celebration for the goal. We begin to crave the recognition more than the effort that goes into earning it.

Our culture has shifted to a place where winning seems to be the only thing that matters. We see celebrities, athletes, and entrepreneurs celebrated for their achievements, and we want that same recognition. It's tempting to focus on the "*celebrated state*" as the ultimate goal, forgetting that the path to it is often long, hard, and filled with challenges that are rarely shown to the public.

The reality is that we live in a generation where many people feel entitled to be heard, to win, or to be celebrated—without doing the necessary work. We want the result without the struggle. We want the applause, the recognition, the finish line, without realizing that the real value lies in the grind that comes before any of that.

All the people who look successful today have put in a tremendous amount of work to get there. We see the end result—the Nobel Prizes, the Oscars, the books on best-seller lists—but we don't often see the years of hard work, failure, and rejection that led to those moments.

Take Barack Obama, who went on to become the President of the United States, spent years as a community organizer in Chicago, learning the

ropes of politics and making mistakes along the way. Mark Zuckerberg had other failed ventures before creating Facebook, and even after Facebook's initial success, the company faced constant setbacks and controversies. Seth Godin, the marketing genius, mailed and received back over 800 rejection letters before his books became best-sellers. Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison, before becoming the icon of post-apartheid South Africa. Barry Jenkins, the director of Moonlight, made several failed films before his breakthrough, with the movie that would go on to win an Academy Award. And Eminem, now a global icon, started with an album titled Infinite that sold only a handful of copies. These individuals did not become successful because they were lucky; they became successful because they put in the work, failed, got back up, and kept going, even when no one was watching.

It's easy to look at these people and think that success is a matter of being in the right place at the right time. But the truth is, the applause, the awards, the recognition—those things are often beyond our control. We can't predict when or if we'll be celebrated, and we certainly can't control when or how success will show up.

What we can control, however, is the work.

The effort we put into our craft, day after day,

year after year, is within our control. It is hard, tedious, and requires a level of commitment and discipline that many people aren't willing to give. But without it, the celebration will never come. You cannot win without putting in the work first.

We need to shift the focus from the idea of success as an event to success as a process. It's about doing the work, not waiting for the world to recognize you. We should be more focused on outworking everyone else, on putting in more effort than anyone around us. It's about showing up every day, even when there's no applause, even when no one is watching. There are no shortcuts to true success. It's not about chasing superfluous metrics like awards, followers, or views. It's about dedicating yourself to the work, honing your craft, and staying committed even when the world doesn't immediately reward you for your effort.

The work, of course, looks different for everyone. It's not always about writing a best-selling book or painting the next Starry Night. It could be the artist who spends hours perfecting their craft in silence practicing one thing at a time, over and over again, or the architect who sketches plans for months before breaking ground on a building, or the entrepreneur who tests and tweaks their business idea in small increments, all while facing rejection and failure.

The work might be writing one song a day, painting one canvas a week, or practicing one speech after another. It's the willingness to show up and do the things that other people are too afraid or too lazy to do. It's the quiet, consistent action that ultimately leads to breakthrough moments.

Some might argue that the work is boring, that it lacks the glamour of the final product. They are right. The work is often unglamorous. It's long hours without immediate rewards, countless failures, and moments of doubt. It's the grind that no one sees, the sacrifices that no one knows about. But it's also the foundation on which everything else is built. Success, whether it's in art, business, or life, is built on the back of unseen effort. The applause comes at the end, but the real growth happens in the process, during those long, difficult hours that no one sees but you.

It's time to change the conversation. Rather than focusing on the outcome—the applause, the awards, the recognition—let's focus on the work. Let's encourage each other to put in the effort, to keep going when things get tough, and to commit to the journey without needing immediate validation. Success isn't an event. It's a practice. It's a continuous process of doing the work, over and over, even when it feels like no one is watching. And when the time comes, when the

applause finally arrives, you'll know that it's not just a celebration of your success—it's a recognition of all the hours of work you've put in to make it happen.

Success is not a destination, and it is certainly not a trophy. It's the quiet moments of persistence and dedication that build your path. If you want to succeed, do the work. And do it without expecting applause. The applause will come, but only after you've earned it.

TWELVE
There is no secret.

The secret ingredient is... nothing! You heard me. Nothing! There is no secret ingredient. - Mr. Ping, Kung Fu Panda

We are, as a culture, obsessed with secrets. The term itself is seductive. There's something in the word that promises revelation, that hints at something hidden, something exclusive, reserved for the chosen few alchemists who have figured out how to turn a base metal to gold. It's the "secret" to wealth, the "secret" to happiness, the "secret" to success in business, in love, in life itself. Our appetite for this idea is infinite: the next life-changing hack, the little-known trick that will transform our mundane routines into something extraordinary.

I have, like many, been lured by the promise of such secrets. I've purchased the books, clicked

through the online webinars, and scrolled endlessly through the Instagram profiles of the self-appointed gurus who claim to have cracked the code to every facet of existence. They offer solutions to all of life's great mysteries, from how to sculpt a perfect body to how to make a fortune without breaking a sweat. The catch, of course, is that the promises rarely hold up to scrutiny. More often than not, the "secret" ends up being nothing more than an oversimplification or, worse, a distraction from the real work that's required to achieve anything meaningful.

At some point, it becomes clear: there is no secret.

There is only the basics. The fundamentals, those time-tested principles that, in their simplicity, can feel almost too obvious to be taken seriously. But this is where the truth lies. The quest for the next new thing—whether it's the latest diet trend or the newest productivity hack—distracts us from the truth that has always been right in front of us. Success, fulfilment, and happiness are not hidden in the latest innovation; they are embedded in the mundane. And before we embark on our next search for the secret to life's great pursuits, we might want to first ask ourselves: Have we mastered the fundamentals?

Take relationships, for example. The advice on

this front is almost embarrassingly simple: communicate well, be loyal, be present, listen, be kind. These are not groundbreaking insights, yet they remain the bedrock of any successful relationship. We hear it constantly, but how often do we really practice it? We convince ourselves that the "secret" to love and connection lies in some complex psychology, some advanced technique to seduce or manipulate, when the truth is that a strong relationship is built on the basics: consistency, attention, mutual respect. And so we waste time on the superficial, always looking for a shortcut, when the work itself—the real, hard work—is deceptively simple. Show up. Be honest. Love deeply.

Health, too, is a domain where the fundamentals rarely fail us. How many times have you found yourself in pursuit of the next big wellness breakthrough—a supplement, an innovative exercise routine, or a revolutionary diet plan? And how often have those promises turned out to be fleeting or futile? What's become clear over the years is that health doesn't thrive on trends. It thrives on the basics: a balanced diet, regular exercise, enough sleep, and stress management. There is no shortcut to good health. The so-called "biohacking" world, with its flashy gadgets and supposed hacks, doesn't provide a fast track to wellness. It only serves to distract from what we know to be true: Health requires

discipline, not a magic pill.

The same truth applies to business and wealth. We are bombarded with promises of easy money, the "secret" formula for riches. Entrepreneurs in polished suits appear on our screens, telling us that with the right mindset, we too can achieve financial freedom. They claim that there's a secret to success—a formula, a set of steps that, if followed correctly, will lead to unimaginable wealth. But when you peel back the layers of such promises, the reality is much less glamorous: it's about offering a good product or service, building trust, and putting in the necessary work day after day. There are no get-rich-quick shortcuts, no secret tips that will make all your dreams come true without effort. Hard work, consistency, and time are what actually build businesses, and that has been true for centuries.

And when it comes to spiritual life? Here, too, we are urged to seek the new, the novel—the next app, the next practice, the next guru who will guide us toward inner peace or enlightenment. We are told that there's a secret path to spiritual awakening, one that can be unlocked through the right set of techniques or a special kind of meditation. But for all our searching, the core principles of spiritual life remain remarkably simple: compassion, mindfulness, forgiveness, gratitude. These are the fundamental teachings of

nearly every spiritual tradition. And yet, how often do we seek out the latest shortcut instead of cultivating the timeless virtues that lead to peace? How often do we turn to the new and forget the old?

There's a reason why, despite all of our advancements and innovations, the truly profound teachings in life remain unchanged. In a sense, they never really went anywhere—they were always there, waiting for us to return.

Jeff Bezos in his leadership at Amazon used to ask a simple but profound question: *What will always remain the same?* In a world obsessed with change, Bezos' answer was refreshingly grounded in first principles: Customers will always want low prices, and they will always want faster delivery. These are not secrets. These are facts, simple and constant, and in focusing on these fundamentals, Bezos was able to build one of the most successful companies in the world.

The truth is, there is no shortcut to life's most important pursuits. We may be living in an age that promises instantaneous success, but the best things in life don't come from shortcuts. They come from a sustained commitment to the basics—the fundamentals that have stood the test of time. Whether it's in love, health, business, or spirituality, the real secret is to stop looking for

secrets. Before chasing the latest trend, it might be worthwhile to ask: Have I mastered the basics? Have I put in the work? Have I shown up for the things that matter?

So, the next time we're tempted by the allure of a quick fix, let's take a moment to step back and ask ourselves a more meaningful question: What are the fundamentals I haven't yet mastered? Because the truth is, there's no secret to life's most important pursuits. It's all in the work—and the work is always rooted in the basics.

THIRTEEN
This is entrepreneurship.

What is it that you do that you are the best in the world at? You offer a service - you didn't invent; a formula - you didn't invent; a delivery method - you didn't invent. Nothing about what you do is patentable or a unique user experience. You haven't identified an isolated market segment; haven't truly branded your concept. You need me to go on? – Bobby Axelrod from the tv series "Billions"

In today's world, entrepreneurship has taken on the allure of a lifestyle, a story, or even a form of self-expression. What was once about delivering products and services to customers has been rebranded, reshaped, and romanticized into something that looks a lot like a personal quest or a journey of self-actualization.

Modern entrepreneurship is rife with phrases like "following your passion" and "telling your story," while seminars and conferences overflow with influencers touting the glamour of being an

entrepreneur. It's easy to lose track of what entrepreneurship truly is—and what it isn't.

At its heart, entrepreneurship is not about accolades, social impact statements, or personal narratives. It's about taking something of value, turning it into a reliable commodity, distributing it widely, and creating efficient systems to ensure it continues to deliver value.

This is entrepreneurship.

Yet somewhere along the way, we lost sight of these fundamentals. Instead, we've created a mythos around entrepreneurship that has less to do with building sustainable, profit-driven enterprises and more to do with a sort of idolized role-playing. The focus has drifted from the unglamorous work of business-building—commodity creation, distribution, and administration—to a glossy image of the "entrepreneurial journey."

Entrepreneurs have become icons, people whose personal stories and curated lifestyles have become as valuable as the products or services they're supposed to be creating. Influencers who dub themselves "serial entrepreneurs" without having managed a single sustainable business abound, spouting insights on branding, storytelling, and mindset while rarely mentioning

the bedrock principles that actually make businesses last. In the process, we've turned entrepreneurship into a performance, a spectacle that distracts from what should be a pragmatic and results-driven pursuit.

The first principle of real entrepreneurship, often overlooked in this noise, is commodification. Commodification is about making a product consistent and reliable. It's the process of creating something that customers can count on to be the same every time. This concept is less glamorous but absolutely fundamental.

Take Red Bull, for instance. Red Bull is essentially a caffeinated beverage, yet it has become a worldwide staple, available in convenience stores from Europe to Asia. Why? Because every can of Red Bull offers the same product experience. It doesn't matter where in the world you buy it; the flavour, effect, and branding are identical. Red Bull's value lies not in being a unique product each time but in being predictably consistent. They didn't need to reinvent the drink; they needed to ensure that it delivered the same impact wherever it went. This reliability turns products into household names, and it's the backbone of any scalable business.

Next comes distribution, the engine that drives the availability and reach of a commodified

product. If you can make a product reliable, the next task is to get it to as many people as possible, as seamlessly as possible. This means setting up strong distribution channels and solving logistical puzzles, not for the thrill of it but because, without it, even the best product won't gain traction.

Liquid Death, the canned water brand, provides a perfect example. Liquid Death didn't succeed just because it had a memorable brand or quirky marketing. It succeeded because it was everywhere—concerts, festivals, supermarkets. The company mastered distribution, ensuring that its product was as accessible as any soda or beer. For Liquid Death, distribution isn't a side thought; it's an essential part of its growth strategy. No matter how clever the brand, if the product isn't available at the moment of customer demand, it loses its footing. Distribution is about making sure the product shows up, reliably and repeatedly, in the places where consumers are ready to buy.

The final piece of true entrepreneurship, often ignored in today's image-obsessed business culture, is systematized administration. Systematization means creating routines, automations, and management processes that allow a business to run smoothly without constant hands-on oversight. This is the foundation of a business's ability to grow and scale. Systematized business administration is the invisible machinery

that allows a business to function efficiently, even as it grows.

Consider Itel, a mobile phone company known throughout Africa. Itel's success isn't due to high-end marketing or a groundbreaking new device design; it's because they provide affordable, reliable phones distributed through an extensive network, backed by efficient, localized administration. Their administrative systems, from inventory management to customer service, are set up to handle the scale and variation that come with operating in diverse markets. Systematized business practices make the company a going concern, able to operate with minimal disruption, and to keep their product flow steady.

In parts of the world like Africa, and especially in countries like Zimbabwe, many young entrepreneurs face a real challenge: distinguishing the business from the brand. They're told that telling their story or standing for a cause will elevate their work, but the advice they're rarely given is about how to make products dependable or how to handle distribution. In a challenging market where access, reliability, and trust are paramount, these principles become the difference between a business that survives and one that fails.

The difficulty of understanding commodification and distribution—rather than

simply focusing on "creating a brand"—is one of the biggest obstacles to sustainable business in emerging markets. A brand without the support of product reliability and easy access is simply an image, an idea that's gone no further than the drawing board.

The reality is that a business's most important function is to make money. This may sound old-fashioned, especially in an era where the triple bottom line of "people, planet, profit" is in vogue. And, of course, a business shouldn't be blind to its impact on society and the environment. Yet for a business to have a meaningful and lasting impact, it must first be financially viable. Money isn't just part of the business; it's the engine. Businesses that lose sight of this get lost in the fog of cause-driven marketing, social metrics, and image-building, while the bedrock—profitability—cracks beneath them.

Entrepreneurship, at its core, is a matter of creating products that work, making them available to the people who need them, and building efficient systems to keep it all running. The rest—the awards, the "journeys," the personal stories—may embellish the business, but they are not the business itself.

True entrepreneurship is about the gritty, less glamorous work of ensuring consistency, building

distribution, and creating systems that allow a company to thrive sustainably. It's not an act of self-expression but of self-discipline. The difference between those who succeed and those who don't often comes down to understanding that entrepreneurship is not about who you are, but about what you deliver, reliably, to the world.

FOURTEEN
The business of business is business.

The purpose of business is to create wealth for its owners. – Adam Smith

There was a time when business was simple. In the corporate ethos of a long-gone era, people talked about profits, losses, and the bottom line with a frankness that today might feel unsophisticated, even cold. In the world of classic capitalism, the defining metric of success was singular: profit.

You could make a product, sell it, and if the numbers added up at the end of the quarter, you had yourself a viable business. Somehow, along the way, that clear-cut calculus has been obscured. In our current age of "social entrepreneurship" and "mission-driven business models", it seems that

money—once the undisputed king of business metrics—has taken a back seat.

Today, we live in a time where entrepreneurship is romanticized, where the idea of "starting something" comes with its own cultural capital, detached from the need for tangible, financial success.

The language of business has changed, and with it, the nature of how we measure what it means to "win." There's talk of impact, of social good, of purpose, diversity, and community. These are valuable considerations, no doubt. But somehow, in our collective rush to redefine what business can and should be, we seem to have forgotten that business, at its core, is about making money.

It's an unsettling shift. By expanding the definition of what it means to run a successful business, we've piled on additional responsibilities—measures that can cloud the very purpose of business itself. Today, a company can make headlines not for its profitability but for the social good it purports to promote, the diversity of its workforce, or its commitment to "green" practices. In a cultural moment that prizes impact over income, we're left wondering if this expanded view of business isn't obscuring its primary function. This isn't to say that the "triple bottom line" approach—prioritizing profits, people, and

the planet—isn't a noble ambition. But the reality remains: if businesses cannot sustain themselves financially, they cannot make a meaningful or lasting difference in any other arena.

We have moved into an era where business ventures often appear to be more interested in impact metrics than in profit margins. Donor-backed NGOs, for example, prioritize and fund companies based on their alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While SDGs address critical global needs—poverty, education, equality, climate action—investors and founders seem to forget that, at the end of the day, a business without a profit isn't sustainable. Companies that are profitable have the power to influence and reinvest in communities, ultimately driving change on a greater scale than any fleeting project funded by a one-time grant. But as the current culture stands, *grantpreneurship*, attention, and praise often flow toward companies with a social cause, regardless of whether they are viable businesses.

At the same time, we see companies bending to non-economic metrics that don't necessarily drive revenue. Consider diversity and inclusion. These are undeniably essential values in our broader social context. But the question becomes murky when these values become business mandates—when they're applied in ways that place them on

par with financial performance. Companies are judged by how many women they have on their boards, how diverse their executive teams are, and whether they're meeting certain social expectations. Diversity matters, but when these initiatives fail to connect to the business's bottom line, they can risk becoming superficial gestures—essentially "box-ticking" exercises that don't address real inequities but consume resources that could be allocated toward innovation and profitability.

Perhaps the most striking development in today's business landscape is the rise of "pop entrepreneurship," a cottage industry of motivational speakers, self-styled gurus, and podcast hosts who offer glossy visions of what it means to be an entrepreneur. Figures like Robert Kiyosaki and Grant Cardone have become icons, not necessarily for building successful businesses, but for selling the idea of success itself. Courses, workshops, and "entrepreneurship" conferences promise to teach the secret to business, to impart the knowledge of how to "hustle," and to instill the confidence of a billionaire.

But this approach often feels more like entertainment than education, more like lifestyle advice than financial strategy. Pop entrepreneurship champions the grind, the hustle, the notion of building your personal brand, but

seldom does it dwell on the unglamorous necessity of making—and keeping—money.

The business of business has become about selling entrepreneurship as a lifestyle, rather than teaching the hard, often tedious work of creating profitable ventures. This generation of would-be entrepreneurs is urged to think about everything but profitability. They are encouraged to build a story, to consider the "social impact" of their products, and to think about how their brand aligns with current trends. These aspirations make entrepreneurship appear noble, but they risk divorcing it from its fundamental purpose. Business success is ultimately about creating a sustainable, profit-generating enterprise. Focusing on the bottom line is not only responsible but essential for longevity.

There's a simple truth that underpins all this, one that often gets lost in the shuffle: if a business cannot make money, it cannot survive. Profit is not an outdated metric; it is the engine that powers every other goal a business may have. Companies that make money can reinvest in their communities, create new products, and even address social issues. A healthy bottom line is what keeps the lights on and the doors open. It's what allows a company to build, expand, and influence. Without it, all the talk of social good, community impact, and environmental stewardship remains

just that—talk.

Money, then, is more than just the bottom line; it is the foundation upon which a business stands or falls. Embracing this reality need not come at the expense of social good or environmental consciousness. In fact, it's what makes these goals achievable. Businesses that prioritize profitability create a foundation strong enough to support meaningful change. They aren't reliant on external funding or fickle consumer trends because their financials are sound. They have the freedom to innovate, to reinvest, and to influence. A business that is financially stable can contribute to the world in ways that a struggling enterprise never will.

To be clear, this is not a call to abandon corporate responsibility or to ignore the broader role that companies play in society. Rather, it's a reminder that the core function of business is to generate profit. Focusing on profitability, companies ensure that they remain viable, that they can continue to serve their customers, their employees, and their communities. Profitability provides the means to address social and environmental challenges—not as obligations, but as opportunities that align with a company's growth and success.

In a world of shifting business models and expanded definitions of success, perhaps it's time

to remember the essential purpose of business.

The triple bottom line is a worthy goal, but it must be built on a foundation of financial viability. Profits aren't the enemy of progress; they're what make progress possible.

At its core, the business of business is business. And perhaps that is exactly what we need to remember.

FIFTEEN
The opportunity fallacy.

Good luck can be enticed by accepting opportunity. – George S. Clason, from "The Richest Man in Babylon"

We humans are creatures of pattern, perhaps to a fault. We crave order, certainty—especially in a world that can feel overwhelmingly chaotic. And so, we invent patterns, even where they don't exist. The most persistent of these is the belief that "the opportunity will come again." It's a comforting thought. The idea that the moment we miss, the chance we squandered, will somehow return to us, bigger and better, like a tide that rises again. It's a safety net we create for ourselves, one that allows us to relax, to procrastinate, to believe there's always another shot just around the corner.

But here's the truth: that shot might never come.

In fact, it's likely that it won't. Opportunities are fleeting. And the very belief that they will come again often leads us to miss the ones right in front of us. The businessman who strikes it rich after a single big contract is a prime example of this illusion in action. Flush with success, he feels invincible. He upgrades his life—a bigger car, a bigger house, finer clothes. He thinks, "This is it. This is my moment." Success has finally knocked. But before long, the tide recedes. The contracts slow. The trend fades. And suddenly, that once-bright business is on the verge of collapse.

What went wrong? He thought the opportunity would return. He treated his sudden windfall as disposable cash—spending it as though more would always follow. But the truth is, no amount of wishful thinking can make opportunity behave like a boomerang. The moment passes, and if we haven't prepared for it—if we haven't seized it when we had the chance—it's gone. This is the heart of the problem: we fool ourselves into thinking that opportunities, like old friends, will always come back. But the reality is far less forgiving.

The truth is uncomfortable: Opportunities don't have to come again. And the real trick—if we want to thrive—is learning how to seize them when they appear, with both hands, and without hesitation. No waiting, no second-guessing. It's

not just about being in the right place at the right time; it's about being ready to act when the moment arrives. In business, in relationships, in personal growth—timing is everything.

Take, for example, the businessman who has a fleeting moment of success. He might earn a large profit or gain a new contract, and while this is a win, he makes a fatal error: he spends it. He treats the success as a final destination, a reward to be enjoyed. Instead of reinvesting that profit into his business to ensure future growth, he uses it to upgrade his lifestyle. The result? A short-lived high. The business stagnates, and the luxury he indulged in becomes a burden, draining the resources he should have preserved. It's easy to understand the temptation to spend, to enjoy the fruits of your labour—but that immediate pleasure comes at a steep cost. When the next opportunity does come—if it comes at all—he'll find himself ill-prepared to capitalize on it.

This brings us to the first guiding principle: when opportunity knocks, we must act, and we must act with purpose.

Procrastination—waiting for a perfect moment, hoping for the ideal scenario—only delays progress. The perfect moment doesn't exist, at least not in the way we imagine it. Life is messy. Opportunities are often imperfect, appearing

when we least expect them, sometimes in forms we don't initially recognize. But that's the challenge: to see them for what they are, to recognize them, and to seize them, flaws and all. If you hesitate or look for the next best thing, you risk missing your chance altogether. Opportunity isn't waiting around. When it's gone, it's gone.

The second guiding principle is this: when we reap the rewards of an opportunity, we must see those rewards as an investment in the future, not as money to spend on fleeting comforts.

It's easy to get caught up in the idea that success is about spending, upgrading, enjoying the good life. But true success is about using what we gain to create more success. When a businessperson makes a profit, that money isn't meant for immediate gratification; it's meant to be reinvested. The same applies to every area of life. The promotion at work, the bonus check, the new contacts—these are not just rewards. They are tools to be used to propel us forward, to build something sustainable.

If we treat our successes as investments, we are setting ourselves up for future rewards. This isn't just financial—it's relational, emotional, intellectual. Every opportunity, when leveraged properly, can compound into something far greater than the initial reward. A freelancer who

lands a major project, for example, could take that money and invest it into better tools or education, ensuring that future opportunities become even more rewarding. The same logic applies when we receive any kind of reward. The point is: don't consume your success. Don't let it slip through your fingers as a momentary indulgence. Use it to build something more lasting.

The real magic of success lies in compounding. Every time we take an opportunity and turn it into a long-term investment, we are creating momentum that builds on itself. Think about the freelancer who reinvests in their education. That investment doesn't just improve their skills—it opens up new opportunities, ones that lead to better-paying, more fulfilling projects. The same is true for businesses, relationships, even personal growth. The small wins, accumulated over time, lead to exponential returns. But we can't expect that to happen if we treat every success as a one-off, something to be spent and forgotten.

Opportunities compound by how we handle them. The rewards we earn compound by how we reinvest them.

But there's also a darker side to this equation. Opportunities lost don't just vanish—they compound as well. A missed opportunity isn't a neutral event; it has a ripple effect, slowing your

progress and making the next one harder to catch. This is why procrastination is so dangerous. The more we delay, the more we risk falling behind. When we spend too much time waiting for the next opportunity, or when we misuse the rewards we do get, we're essentially wasting the chance to build on our past successes.

The belief that "the opportunity will come again" is a seductive lie, one that allows us to relax, to feel safe. But the truth is harsher. Opportunities are finite. They don't wait around for us to be ready. They appear, and then they vanish. The key is to act when they arrive, and to use the rewards they bring as the foundation for something even greater. Every opportunity we seize compounds, and every reward we reinvest compounds, too. This is how we build momentum, how we create a future that is more than just a series of random, fleeting chances. The real power lies not in waiting for the next opportunity, but in recognizing that the moment we have right now is the only one we can control. And that's where the real work begins.

SIXTEEN
Regretted children.

Our sire's age was worse than our grandsire's. We, their sons, are more worthless than they; so in our turn we shall give the world a progeny yet more corrupt. – Horace, from Book III of Odes (20 BC)

Every generation seems to face the same rebuke: "You don't understand hard work. You're entitled, lazy, lost." It's a refrain that has echoed across centuries, from Ancient Greece to the industrial age, from the war-ravaged 20th century to the fractured world of the 21st. Today, however, it feels sharper, as if society itself has taken up the mantle of disappointed parent, grimacing at the children it no longer recognizes.

Our world, once shaped by secure nuclear families and stable, lifelong jobs, now finds itself reeling from massive shifts. The traditional family structure, once the cornerstone of society, has frayed under the pressures of divorce, shifting

gender roles, and widening ideological chasms. The rise of the gig economy has traded stability for flexibility, yet stripped workers of long-term security. And in a world where screens mediate nearly every interaction, digital life has supplanted face-to-face relationships, amplified in many ways by the isolating persisting impact of COVID-19 lockdowns. It's a perfect storm of change that has left the older generation perplexed and, often, regretful.

Ask a member of the older generation about "kids these days," and the list of grievances is long. They lament a lost work ethic, an absence of values, and a fixation on social media at the expense of "real" experiences. The young, they claim, are more willing to air grievances online than work in silence; they want fairness instead of falling in line; they value individual principles over the collective interest of their country. In a world of globalized crises, this generation seems to view patriotism with suspicion, or worse, indifference, refusing to make the same sacrifices as those who fought the wars that shaped the 20th century.

But this lament of "regretted children" is not unique to our era. In the 1920s, the *Lost Generation* was accused of aimlessness and extravagance; in the 1960s, *Baby Boomers* were seen as idealistic dreamers rejecting the practical wisdom of their parents; in the 1990s, *Generation X* faced

accusations of cynicism and disengagement. And here we are, a century later, facing the same lament that has circled through time. "Young people don't want to work anymore," they say. The irony? That particular complaint has been traced back to records over a hundred years old. Every generation, in its turn, sees the next as deficient, lacking the grit, fortitude, or values that supposedly defined their own youth.

Today's young people, though, bear the brunt of a particularly venomous critique, spurred by profound ideological divisions. Political and cultural battles—over gender, sexuality, economic policies—cut deeply. What one generation sees as "toxic femininity," another views as hard-won liberation from oppressive norms.

What the older generation calls "entitlement," the younger generation considers a demand for fairness in an economy that offers diminishing returns. And for many, the old mantra of "love of country above all" rings hollow in a world where patriotism is complicated by the weight of history and a profound awareness of injustice. This generation does not necessarily reject patriotism; it questions its value when it stands at odds with principle.

The gig economy has only worsened the divide. What the old generation saw as stability—a career,

a pension, the promise of a home—now feels like an increasingly distant memory. Instead, young people navigate a world where work is often temporary and benefits few. To survive, they juggle multiple jobs, often without healthcare or retirement funds, hustling for a semblance of security. It's a model that offers freedom, sure, but at a cost: work becomes a transient experience, and loyalty to any one company or institution feels like a fool's errand. In a world built on constant reinvention, why bother with the loyalty that was once the bedrock of society?

And yet, the older generation is worried. Many grew up in a world where work meant permanence and reward, where institutions were stable and generally just, where hard work and sacrifice were seen as national virtues, not personal impositions. The younger generation's skepticism, they argue, is little more than laziness cloaked in idealism. But for young people today, personal values matter as much as professional goals. They refuse to live a life that doesn't reflect their principles, whether it's declining a job with exploitative practices or refusing to fight in a war they don't believe in. To them, it's not about dodging sacrifice; it's about choosing integrity over conformity.

All of this, though, is the cyclical fate of every generation. In peacetime, a generation becomes more open, less defensive, and more questioning

of old institutions. They value self-fulfilment, question authority, and resist the demands of a nationalistic society that does not represent them. During wartime or economic hardship, on the other hand, unity, resilience, and sacrifice emerge as values to be preserved. But it's a pendulum, one that swings in rhythm with history. When the pendulum swings in a direction we cannot comprehend, we begin to regret our children.

Nostalgia only heightens the sting. The older generation remembers their own struggles and triumphs with a sense of honour and pride. They survived wars, economic downturns, and political upheavals—surely, they think, the young can do the same. But what nostalgia omits is the nuance, the contradictions, the idiosyncrasies of each era. It's easy to remember only the virtues, to forget the flaws, to think that the past was better simply because it is the past. In doing so, we lose the ability to understand the present on its own terms.

So here we are, again, a society lamenting its own children, the same way it has lamented them for centuries. Every generation is, in its own way, "regretted." In a world that changes at breakneck speed, the young will always seem radical, while the old will feel displaced. But perhaps there is something liberating in this. The cycle of regret is inevitable, but it doesn't have to be permanent. We may regret our children, but they, too, will become

us someday, and we will simply become their memory.

The challenge, then, is not to transcend the cycle but to understand it—to recognize that every new generation is shaped by forces different from the ones that shaped us. They are, inevitably, a response to the world they've inherited, reacting to it with fresh ideas, new values, and yes, even rebellion. They are not weaker, or more entitled, or less principled. They are, quite simply, themselves. And that, perhaps, is enough.

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SEVENTEEN
War on drugs?

Imagine if the government chased sick people with diabetes…and told doctors they couldn't treat them, then sent them to jail. If we did that, everyone would know we were crazy. Yet we do practically the same thing everyday in the week to sick people hooked on drugs. – Billie Holiday

A man, weary and numb, walks into his doctor's office. "I'm addicted to drugs," he says. The doctor examines him. "No," he says, "this is how you've been dealing with your real problems." And therein lies a truth we often fail to confront: the war on drugs, waged as a battle to eliminate addiction, has largely missed the point. It has become a war against people in pain, who turn to drugs to numb their suffering, not to embrace it.

For generations, society has viewed drug users as weak, degenerate, even dangerous. Our response? To prohibit and punish, to crack down

harder, to isolate and stigmatize. In theory, this is all done to "save" addicts from their plight. Yet in reality, this crusade rarely addresses the reasons people use drugs in the first place: hopelessness, existential angst, poverty, and the crushing weight of unmet expectations. We imagine we are solving the problem, yet we only create more barriers between people and the help they desperately need.

Drugs provide escape, and we condemn people for seeking it. But what if we asked a deeper question: why do people feel the need to escape in the first place?

The "Rat Park" experiment, conducted by psychologist Bruce Alexander in the late 1970s, offers a powerful perspective on this issue. Alexander placed rats in two different environments. One was a small, solitary cage with nothing but food, water, and drug-laced water. In this lonely setup, rats drank the drugged water until they overdosed. But then Alexander built a more stimulating environment, a "rat park" where the rats had space, companions, and activities. Here, they largely ignored the drug-laced water, opting instead for healthier, more natural interactions. The conclusion was clear: addiction wasn't solely about the drugs but about the conditions in which these animals lived. When given a fulfilling, stimulating life, the rats chose to stay clear-headed.

Humans aren't rats, but they are animals, and the implications are undeniable. When life becomes a suffocating cage of disappointment, trauma, or unmet needs, drugs become a way out—a way to feel something in a world that feels like it's offering nothing. In our current society, this pain often comes from inequality, isolation, or a profound disconnection from community and purpose. Drugs, however dangerous, can momentarily lift the weight of existence. Billie Holiday once said, "drugs saved my life", meaning, they offered her an escape from the crushing pain of her reality. That in the end they also took her life doesn't invalidate her point; it only reinforces the fact that, for some, an escape—even a fatal one—feels preferable to staying trapped.

Yet instead of tackling these conditions, we double down on the punishment. The "war on drugs" has become a war on the people who use them, as if by isolating or criminalizing them, we are somehow erasing the pain that drove them there. The punitive approach has transformed drug users into society's "others"—scapegoats whose suffering can be reduced to a moral failing or personal weakness. The popular narrative dehumanizes them, much like the "roaches" in the Black Mirror episode *"Men Against Fire,"* where the dehumanization of enemies makes it easier to justify violence against them. In our own world,

labelling addicts as "degenerates" or "criminals" means we no longer have to confront their humanity, their stories, or their struggles. It absolves us of the need to ask the hard questions about what drove them to that place and, more importantly, what keeps them there.

Our approach — prevention through prohibition — fails to recognize that people aren't motivated by laws when seeking relief from suffering. It doesn't ask why drugs became their only option, nor does it seek to provide alternative pathways.

Imagine if, instead, we shifted our focus to creating a society where people had fewer reasons to seek escape. A society that prioritized financial stability, mental health care, community support, and social services; it could offer people a real chance at life. If we gave people fulfilling environments and stable, hopeful lives, maybe fewer would need to escape at all.

This isn't to romanticize or justify drug use. Drugs can and do ruin lives. But perhaps the bigger question isn't "How do we stop people from using drugs?" but "How do we make a society they won't want to escape from?" People turn to drugs because, in their eyes, the alternative — daily life — feels worse. If we continue to wage war on drugs without confronting the root causes

of addiction, we're only addressing the symptoms, not the disease.

The war on drugs should be, at its heart, a war on the conditions that make drugs appealing in the first place. We should be asking what creates the cages, the dismal, lonely spaces that push people to numb themselves. It's not enough to "just say no"; we need to give people something to say yes to—purpose, support, a sense of belonging. The fight shouldn't be against the people who use drugs but against the societal structures that leave them feeling like they have no other way out.

To truly "win" the war on drugs, we have to stop seeing it as a war against individuals and start seeing it as a challenge to build a society that meets people's needs. Rather than judging people for their escape, we should be asking ourselves why we've made a society they feel they must escape from. If we can do that, perhaps someday, the idea of a war on drugs will be obsolete, a relic of a time when we mistakenly fought the symptom instead of the cause.

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EIGHTEEN
Truth 3.0.

Anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that 'my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.' – Isaac Asimov

Truth 3.0 (popularly referred to as post-truth) refers to the era of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, where the pursuit of truth has been undermined by the rise of *"alternative facts."* Unlike previous periods in human history, Truth 3.0 signifies a departure from intellectual rigor and evidence-based inquiry, favouring emotionally satisfying narratives and subjective interpretations. The term, inspired by the naming conventions of technological progress like "Web 3.0," carries a faux noble tone, reframing regression as innovation.

Definition and Etymology

Truth 3.0 describes the cultural shift towards rejecting traditional, evidence-based approaches to truth in favour of subjective interpretations and deliberate misinformation. This paradigm is characterized by the rise of "alternative facts" — misframed information, disinformation, and malinformation that distort or reject objective realities. The term captures the phenomenon where truth is not determined by evidence but shaped by narratives that resonate emotionally or politically.

Truth 3.0 is the rejection of expertise, the elevation of populist voices, and the proliferation of disinformation. This phenomenon gained prominence in the digital age, particularly during events like the COVID-19 pandemic, where podcasters and influencers often overshadowed scientists in public discourse. It represents the culmination of decades of skepticism toward traditional institutions, but instead of fostering intellectual growth, it has birthed a culture of *anti-intellectualism*.

The phrase "Truth 3.0" mirrors the naming convention of technological progress, as seen in terms like "Web 3.0." It signals a reimagining of truth for a digital and postmodern era, where individuals redefine facts to fit personal beliefs or agendas.

The etymology of Truth 3.0 reflects the breakdown of shared epistemological frameworks. The term highlights the tension between the pursuit of truth and the manipulation of information for ideological, financial, or political gain. Its rise is rooted in the growing skepticism of institutions, the proliferation of digital platforms, and the weaponization of doubt against knowledge-based authorities.

Summary

Truth 3.0 represents a profound shift in society's relationship with truth. Unlike earlier eras that largely sought to establish shared realities based on evidence and rational discourse, this new paradigm emphasizes personal belief over objective fact. The digital age, with its democratized communication channels, has amplified this shift, enabling widespread dissemination of falsehoods and alternative narratives.

In Truth 3.0, truth is fragmented, and its value is often subordinated to ideological or emotional appeal. Traditional arbiters of truth, such as scientists, journalists, and educators, have been undermined, accused of bias, or dismissed as out-of-touch elites. This distrust has fostered a fertile environment for alternative facts, where cherry-picked data or outright fabrications masquerade as

credible information.

A central feature of Truth 3.0 is anti-intellectualism, where expertise is viewed with suspicion or disdain. Instead of relying on verified knowledge, individuals increasingly turn to influencers, podcasters, and populist figures who prioritize relatability and rhetoric over evidence. This phenomenon affects politics, culture, religion, and art, reshaping how society engages with knowledge.

Truth 3.0 is not merely an evolution of how truth is understood; it is a redefinition, marked by the deliberate rejection of shared realities.

History of Truth 3.0

The concept of alternative facts, central to Truth 3.0, has historical roots in propaganda, misinformation, and the manipulation of public opinion. However, the modern rise of alternative facts has been driven by two key developments: the erosion of trust in institutions and the rapid expansion of digital communication.

During the late 20th century, trust in institutions such as governments, universities, and media organizations began to decline. Scandals, perceived elitism, and failures to address public concerns created fertile ground for skepticism. Simultaneously, corporations and political actors

began leveraging this mistrust to spread narratives that served their interests. For example, climate change denial campaigns, funded by fossil fuel companies, used pseudoscience and selective data to question the overwhelming scientific consensus.

The advent of the internet further accelerated this trend. Digital platforms democratized access to information but also enabled the proliferation of misinformation. Social media algorithms amplified content that triggered emotional engagement, often prioritizing sensationalism over accuracy. This dynamic allowed alternative facts to gain traction, creating echo chambers where users were exposed only to information that reinforced their beliefs.

Humanity's relationship with truth has evolved over time, shaped by historical, cultural, and technological forces. Truth 3.0 marks a significant break from earlier approaches to truth-seeking:

The transition to Truth 3.0 did not occur in isolation but emerged from societal and technological shifts over decades. The foundation was laid by Truth 1.0 and Truth 2.0, both of which valued truth, though approached it differently.

Truth 1.0: The Age of Curiosity

This period marked humanity's initial efforts to understand the natural world. From ancient Greece to the Enlightenment, truth was an ideal

pursued through philosophy, observation, and experimentation. Intellectuals like Aristotle, Copernicus, and Galileo revolutionized thought, challenging dogma and seeking universal principles. Curiosity drove progress, and knowledge was seen as a collective endeavor that transcended social class. The era of natural sciences and philosophical inquiry. *Truth was a shared pursuit*, driven by curiosity about the nature of reality. Figures like Socrates, Newton, and Einstein emphasized the importance of both physics and metaphysics in understanding the universe. Knowledge was seen as accessible to anyone willing to explore it.

Truth 2.0: The Age of Codification

Knowledge became codified and institutionalized. Text books, universities, and expert systems emerged to formalize learning and disseminate information. Thinkers like Adam Smith championed specialization, turning knowledge into a certifiable commodity. However, this commodification came at a cost. Schools, influenced by industrial needs, began prioritizing obedience and routine over critical thinking. Profit-driven interests manipulated public understanding, as seen in campaigns about the "necessity" of breakfast or the supposed harmlessness of tobacco. This led to growing public skepticism of institutions, exemplified by works like Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society*. Despite

these critiques, people still valued rigorous critical thinking and believed in the potential for honest intellectual inquiry.

Despite these flaws, Truth 2.0 maintained a commitment to evidence-based reasoning. Critics of the system, such as Illich, argued for reform rather than rejection. Intellectual rigor and critical thinking remained central to public discourse, providing a foundation for societal progress.

Truth 3.0: The Faux Renaissance

A rebranded regression in our relationship with truth. The healthy skepticism of Truth 2.0 has morphed into widespread distrust of expertise and institutions. Where Truth 2.0 challenged systems to improve, Truth 3.0 rejects them outright, often without proposing viable alternatives. Digital platforms amplify misinformation, rewarding sensationalism and emotional resonance over accuracy. Truth is no longer a pursuit but a battleground, fragmented into countless "truths" that cater to individual beliefs. Truth 3.0 arose in response to the limitations and failures of Truth 2.0 but has taken a drastically different path. Instead of refining systems or improving access to knowledge, this era has embraced fragmentation, misinformation, and anti-intellectualism. The digital age has played a key role, enabling the rapid spread of alternative facts and creating echo chambers where truth is subjective.

Unlike its predecessors, Truth 3.0 does not prioritize the pursuit of universal understanding. Instead, it elevates relatability, emotional resonance, and individual belief. Experts are dismissed as elitists, and institutions are seen as inherently corrupt. The result is a society where truth is no longer a shared goal but a divisive tool wielded by various interest groups.

Historical Examples

Corporate Misinformation Campaigns

One of the earliest examples of Truth 3.0 was the deliberate misinformation spread by corporations to protect their profits. In the 1970s, the tobacco industry famously funded studies and public relations campaigns to cast doubt on the link between smoking and cancer. Similarly, fossil fuel companies have long funded efforts to deny the existence of anthropogenic climate change, using selective data and contrarian voices to create the illusion of scientific debate.

The Anti-Vaccination Movement

Although skepticism about vaccines dates back to their invention, the modern anti-vaccination movement gained significant traction in the early 2000s. Fueled by a fraudulent study linking vaccines to autism, this movement exemplifies Truth 3.0's reliance on cherry-picked evidence and emotional appeal over scientific consensus.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a turning point for Truth 3.0. Public health measures such as mask mandates, lockdowns, and vaccines became flashpoints for misinformation. Figures with little to no expertise gained massive followings by promoting alternative narratives, often contradicting medical guidelines. This period highlighted how distrust in science, coupled with the amplification power of digital platforms, could have life-threatening consequences.

Truth 3.0 in Politics

The political realm has been one of the most prominent battlegrounds for Truth 3.0. Politicians have increasingly weaponized *alternative facts* to manipulate public opinion, undermining trust in institutions and the democratic process. Campaigns built on misinformation have become a staple of modern politics, where emotional resonance often triumphs over factual accuracy.

Politicians and their supporters have dismissed unfavourable reporting as biased or fabricated, creating a culture where individuals could selectively accept only the facts that aligned with their worldview. Conspiracy theories, such as those surrounding election fraud, have gained traction despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

This erosion of truth in politics extends globally. Populist leaders have used Truth 3.0 tactics to consolidate power, framing themselves as the voice of the people against so-called elite institutions. The rejection of expert advice on climate change, public health, and economic policy reflects a broader disdain for evidence-based governance.

Truth 3.0 in Culture

In cultural spaces, Truth 3.0 has manifested as a rejection of intellectual rigor in favour of easily digestible, emotionally satisfying narratives. Podcasting and social media platforms play a significant role in this shift, enabling individuals with no expertise to present themselves as thought leaders.

The phenomenon of *sign-posting intelligence* is particularly notable. Influencers and podcasters often signal credibility by using technical jargon or referencing studies without engaging meaningfully with the underlying concepts. This creates the illusion of knowledge without the substance, fostering a culture where relatability trumps expertise.

Additionally, Truth 3.0 has contributed to the fragmentation of cultural narratives. Social media echo chambers allow individuals to exist in self-reinforcing bubbles, where their beliefs are rarely

challenged. This has led to polarized debates on topics ranging from history to identity, with little room for nuanced discourse.

Truth 3.0 in Religion

Religion has always grappled with interpretations of truth, but Truth 3.0 has amplified the spread of pseudoscientific and revisionist ideas within spiritual communities. New-age movements, for example, often incorporate pseudoscience, such as claims about energy healing or crystal vibrations, presenting these as empirical truths despite lacking scientific support.

In more traditional religious spaces, Truth 3.0 manifests through the reinterpretation of doctrine to align with political or cultural agendas. Figures within these communities may dismiss scientific findings, such as climate science, as incompatible with their beliefs. This dynamic has created divisions, where faith-based truths are pitted against evidence-based realities.

Social media has also enabled the rise of "televangelist 2.0" figures, who use digital platforms to promote alternative facts alongside their spiritual messages. These individuals often present themselves as both religious and intellectual authorities, blending faith with misinformation.

Reasons for Truth 3.0

The emergence of Truth 3.0 can be attributed to a combination of cultural, technological, and economic factors that exploit human psychology and societal dynamics.

Grifters and Profiteers

One of the most significant drivers of Truth 3.0 is the presence of individuals and organizations that profit from misinformation. From sellers of pseudoscientific products like essential oils to self-help gurus and conspiracy theorists, many capitalize on skepticism and fear to sell unproven remedies, books, or courses. These figures frame themselves as rebels against "the system," positioning their dubious claims as alternatives to established truths.

Politicians and Populism

Political leaders often exploit Truth 3.0 to gain or maintain power. Promoting narratives that align with their agendas—regardless of factual accuracy—they appeal to emotions like anger, fear, or nostalgia. This tactic fosters a sense of distrust in traditional institutions while galvanizing support from individuals who feel alienated or disenfranchised. The rejection of evidence-based governance, from climate policy to public health, illustrates the politicization of misinformation.

Weaponization of Skepticism

While skepticism is vital for critical thinking, its misuse has fuelled Truth 3.0. Doubting institutions, experts, and data has become a default stance for many, often encouraged by populist rhetoric or misinformation campaigns. This weaponized skepticism does not seek to uncover truth but instead creates perpetual doubt, undermining even the most rigorous evidence.

The Digital Information Ecosystem

Social media platforms and the internet have significantly amplified the reach and impact of Truth 3.0. Algorithms prioritize engagement over accuracy, promoting sensational and emotionally charged content. Additionally, the sheer volume of available information makes it difficult for individuals to distinguish credible sources from unreliable ones, creating fertile ground for alternative facts to thrive.

Cognitive Biases and Tribalism

Human psychology also plays a role in the rise of Truth 3.0. Cognitive biases such as confirmation bias (the tendency to favor information that confirms preexisting beliefs) and the Dunning-Kruger effect (overestimating one's understanding of complex topics) contribute to the rejection of expert knowledge. Tribalism, or the tendency to align with one's social or ideological group, further entrenches these biases, as individuals are less

likely to challenge beliefs that reinforce group identity.

Solutions to Truth 3.0

Addressing Truth 3.0 requires a multifaceted approach that emphasizes education, critical thinking, and the rebuilding of trust in institutions.

Pursuing Truth Over Compromise

Truth 3.0 thrives on the idea that all perspectives are equally valid, even when they contradict evidence. Emphasizing the pursuit of truth—through rigorous analysis, open debate, and the rejection of false equivalence—can help counteract this trend.

Ultimately, combating Truth 3.0 requires a collective commitment to valuing truth, promoting intellectual rigor, and resisting the allure of emotionally satisfying but false narratives.

Returning to Truthfulness Over Truthiness

The rise of Truth 3.0 has blurred the lines between authenticity and accuracy, often prioritizing the appearance of honesty ("truthiness") over the substance of reality ("truthfulness"). While truthiness is about expressing beliefs or opinions sincerely, it does not guarantee that those beliefs align with objective reality. Truthfulness, on the other hand, demands an unwavering commitment to uncovering and

adhering to facts, even when they challenge deeply held convictions or societal narratives.

In an era dominated by subjective interpretations and alternative facts, the need to return to truthfulness is more urgent than ever. Truthfulness requires intellectual humility—a willingness to accept when we are wrong—and the courage to pursue evidence over convenience. It is rooted in the idea that truth is not negotiable or relative but a fundamental aspect of understanding the world and solving its challenges.

Rejecting the superficial *appeal of truthiness* for the rigor of truthfulness demands re-examining how we engage with information. It calls for fostering a culture that values knowledge over opinion, expertise over popularity, and inquiry over affirmation. Truthfulness is not about winning arguments or justifying biases; it is about a shared pursuit of reality that unites rather than divides.

It is only through this return to foundational truths that we can build a society resilient against the distortions of Truth 3.0 and prepared to face the complexities of the modern world.

NINETEEN
Victims of myths.

The truth is that all historical writing, even the most honest, is unconsciously subjective, since every age is bound, in spite of itself, to make the dead perform whatever tricks it finds it necessary for its own peace of mind. – Carl Becker

History serves as both anchor and compass for cultures seeking identity, especially those shaped by trauma and systemic subjugation. Among historically oppressed groups, the drive to reclaim dignity and reshape collective memory is natural and deeply human. Yet, in some cases, this effort produces narratives that veer into mythmaking. These stories of grandeur and exceptionalism—while comforting—risk entrenching cycles of victimhood and fostering a precarious superiority complex. This phenomenon can be seen in the ways many minority communities, navigate their place in history and modern society.

Consider the recurring refrain that Africa was - or is - a land of kings and queens. While it is true that African history boasts empires like Mali, and Great Zimbabwe, the notion that the entire continent was a royal court exaggerates the historical reality.

Most societies, like others across the globe, were agrarian, communal, and complex in ways that didn't necessarily centre around monarchy. Romanticizing the past as one of unbroken nobility ignores the diversity of pre-colonial African societies and risks reducing them to stereotypes of wealth and power. This narrative feels less like an honest exploration of heritage and more like a balm for wounds inflicted by centuries of colonialism and enslavement.

A similar dynamic plays out in the claim that Black people "built America." The contributions of enslaved Africans to the foundation of the United States are undeniable and immense. From the forced labour that fuelled the South's agricultural economy to the cultural influences that shaped music, food, and art, the fingerprints of Black Americans are everywhere. But framing this contribution as the sole or predominant force behind America's rise dismisses the complexity of history. The U.S. was built on the exploitation and cooperation of many groups — including indigenous dispossession, migrant labor, and

industrial ambition. Narrowing the narrative risks alienating potential allies and oversimplifying the multi-layered story of America's creation.

The need to claim historical prominence often coincides with a drive to discredit figures associated with oppression. For instance, the persistent rumour that Beethoven was Black serves as a kind of cultural counterclaim, a way to insert Blackness into a European-dominated canon. Similarly, the reductive argument that Thomas Edison "stole" the invention of the light bulb erases the collaborative and incremental nature of invention itself. These narratives often reflect a distrust of dominant historical accounts, which have excluded or marginalized Black contributions. However, replacing one oversimplified narrative with another does little to advance understanding or justice.

This rewriting of history, while empowering in the short term, has long-term consequences. Myths of superiority and victimhood are seductive because they simplify a world that is often unbearably complex. They create heroes and villains, saints and sinners, in a story where the lines are clearly drawn. But this binary view stunts collective growth. It encourages people to remain locked in a defensive posture, more concerned with reclaiming a perceived lost glory than grappling with the messy, painful truths of the

past, present, and future.

In this context, the fixation on being "the first" or "the only" within a racial framework becomes a natural extension of this mindset. Achievements are framed not as milestones of individual brilliance or community progress, but as triumphs over historical exclusion. The first Black astronaut, the first Black CEO, the first Black Oscar winner—all are celebrated as symbols of overcoming systemic barriers. Yet this constant emphasis on racial exceptionalism can be exhausting and limiting. It ties identity to achievement in a way that leaves little room for failure or ordinariness. It also risks commodifying Black success, turning it into a spectacle for consumption rather than a marker of genuine progress.

At its core, this phenomenon reflects the deep scars left by centuries of dehumanization. For groups whose histories have been erased, distorted, or ignored, the impulse to reclaim and rewrite is both understandable and urgent.

However, there is a fine line between reclaiming history and romanticizing it. True empowerment comes not from mythologizing the past but from understanding it in all its complexity. This means grappling with uncomfortable truths: that Africa, like every other continent, had its flaws; that

America's foundation was a collective effort of exploitation and innovation; that no race or culture holds a monopoly on genius or oppression.

The challenge, then, is to foster a more nuanced narrative—one that celebrates contributions without exaggeration, critiques injustices without erasure, and builds pride without false superiority.

This requires a willingness to engage with history as it was, not as we wish it to be. It demands that we see ourselves not just as victims or conquerors, but as participants in a shared human story, one marked by both triumph and tragedy.

In moving beyond these reductive narratives, there is room for a deeper kind of pride—one rooted not in myths of kings and queens but in the resilience, creativity, and humanity of ordinary people. The enslaved labourer who sang songs of freedom, the community organizer who fought for civil rights, the artist who captured the soul of a generation—these are the true heroes of history. Their stories, though less grandiose, are infinitely richer and more inspiring.

Moreover, acknowledging the complexity of history allows for a more authentic reckoning with present injustices. It shifts the focus from symbolic victories—like "the first Black" to achieve something—to systemic change that benefits

everyone. It challenges systems of oppression without creating new hierarchies of worth based on race or historical grievance. In doing so, it creates space for a more inclusive and equitable future.

The tendency toward mythmaking is not unique to Black communities; it is a universal human response to trauma and marginalization. But for those striving to break free from cycles of oppression, the stakes are especially high. A narrative built on half-truths and exaggerations may offer temporary solace, but it cannot sustain the hard work of liberation. Only by embracing the full complexity of history can we hope to build a future that honours both the past and the possibilities of the present.

In the end, the stories we tell about ourselves matter. They shape our understanding of who we are, where we've been, and where we're going. When those stories are grounded in truth—however uncomfortable—they become a source of genuine strength. And it is in that truth, not in the myths of kings or the erasure of others, that we find the seeds of real and lasting empowerment.

TWENTY
Phantom inclusion.

The NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried, 9-to-5 job. With a few perks thrown in. Real resistance has real consequences. And no salary. ~ Arundhati Roy

We live in a time of new words—catchphrases dressed up as ideals. Inclusion. Representation. Access. They're pinned up in the hallways of corporate offices, they headline HR initiatives, they filter down into community centres and echo through our schools. These are not empty words; they mean something real and hopeful. But all too often, they fall flat. They are more illusion than reality, more posturing than progress. *"Phantom inclusion"* is what I call it: the illusion of a level playing field that hasn't actually changed the terrain.

We organize ourselves into tribes. This is as old

as humanity itself. From the beginning, we've split into groups—around race, gender, religion, geography, language, education—each data point creating a gathering of "us" set against "them." But once we form a tribe, hierarchy is inevitable. The very act of naming a data point gives it weight. It rises to the surface and ranks itself in some unseen but deeply felt order. Suddenly, the simple fact of being a member of one tribe or another comes with privileges or disadvantages. And those who sit at the top of the hierarchy often hold something even more elusive: power.

Power is the currency that turns hierarchy into influence. It's what gives certain tribes dominance, what allows specific voices to set the agenda, shape the conversation, decide who gets a place at the table. We might add diversity to the room, bring in faces that look different, perspectives that vary, but the true holders of power remain, often silently, at the helm. Without a shift in that power, without a deliberate transfer of influence, representation becomes symbolic—a kind of pageantry designed to placate, not to empower.

This issue runs deep in the very structure of our society. Consider the notion of access. The term sounds neutral enough, almost benevolent. When a company, government, or nonprofit offers access, they are, in theory, creating opportunities. But access, as it is often structured, is a minimum

standard, a half-measure. Take healthcare initiatives, for instance. Setting up a clinic in a city might technically provide access to healthcare, but if it's located miles away from the communities that need it most, if it operates in a language foreign to its patients, if it's staffed by people who don't understand the culture of the community they serve, is that really access?

Quality access is another thing entirely. It's about more than proximity; it's about dismantling the barriers to full participation. It requires context, awareness, a deep understanding of what a community actually needs. Imagine, for example, a nonprofit distributing AIDS medication. Dropping supplies at a central location might check a box for access, but quality access would translate instructions into local dialects, distribute medicine through neighbourhood clinics, and broadcast information in a way that reaches everyone.

Quality access doesn't just open the door; it shows people the way inside and makes sure they know they belong.

People are granted a key but have no idea how to use it. And when those who gain access still lack power, they become spectators rather than participants in the very systems they're supposed to join.

The corporate world presents a similar conundrum. A company may pride itself on hiring practices that bring in people from diverse backgrounds. But if these new hires are isolated, excluded from decision-making, or pressured to assimilate, then the act of inclusion is more about optics than impact. The diversity in the room becomes a footnote, an accessory to the real power at play. Inclusion without influence is as hollow as access without autonomy.

True inclusion isn't about satisfying a diversity quota or achieving statistical representation. It's about restructuring the very foundations of power to reflect the full spectrum of society. It's about realigning priorities so that the voices of those who've been marginalized are not just heard but amplified. It's about reimagining access not as a token effort but as an open invitation with every barrier removed.

Perhaps the next time we talk about representation, we might pause and ask ourselves: Who is really in charge here? Whose interests are being served? Who is setting the agenda? These are hard questions, and answering them honestly means coming face-to-face with the inconvenient truth that power is rarely given up easily. But without asking these questions, we risk letting phantom inclusion stand as a substitute for the real

thing.

In a world where tribes and hierarchies are an inevitable part of human nature, the challenge is not to pretend these forces don't exist, but to wield them wisely, with transparency and humility.

Genuine inclusion and high-quality access aren't about erasing difference; they're about embracing it fully, recognizing the richness it brings, and making sure the doors of power are open to all.

It's not enough to add chairs to the table; we must redesign the table itself.

TWENTY-ONE
Designing for flaws.

The danger is not that a particular class is unfit to govern. Every class is unfit to govern. – Lord Acton

Democracy is for stupid people. That might sound harsh, but the truth often is. Democracy isn't built for the best of our intentions—servitude, kindness, and public service. Democracy is made for the average person, the one prone to acting out of ego, impulsive judgment, or fear. At its core, democracy exists because it understands something basic about human nature: we're flawed animals. We want to do good collectively, most of the time, but it's never wise to count on everyone's good intentions.

Our history is littered with examples proving that power, without boundaries, corrupts. So, rather than building a system on the best of human

nature, democracy is built around our worst.

Picture how any group of people begins to form society. Whether bound by shared values, backgrounds, or simply geography, they define a space, a boundary, that marks their shared life. They pool resources, form plans, maybe set up some rules about how they'll protect the environment or ensure a good future for their children. At this point, they begin selecting leaders—people they trust, individuals who appear vested in the community's future. Because there's just too much ground to cover alone, these leaders become the trusted stewards of resources and guides for decisions that affect everyone. From there, things grow larger, inevitably more complex. So, additional local leaders step in to help govern and protect these shared interests, all under one name: government.

But what happens when that government, made up of people we've trusted with our resources and well-being, chooses self-interest over service? What if those selected to steward the collective wealth begin to spend it recklessly or divert it toward purposes that no one agreed to? Worse still, what if they use their newfound authority to silence critics or act against perceived enemies?

The answer to these questions shapes the structure of democracy. Because democracy, in its brilliance, is based on an unflinching acceptance of

our weaknesses. Knowing that power can corrupt, democracy establishes protections not for the good intentions of leaders but for the inevitability that, eventually, leaders will act in self-interest. It plans for the times when the stewards of public trust misuse it.

First comes the vote. In democracy, leadership isn't determined by divinity, birthright or the ambitions of a few; it's decided by the collective voice. In a democratic system, everyone is given a choice, everyone is counted, and everyone's opinion is registered in selecting the next leaders. The popular vote may not always yield perfect results, but it is at least an opportunity to root out those who clearly do not have the people's confidence. More than anything, voting ensures that power is not something handed down from a few but is continually earned, with full transparency.

Yet elections alone can't be trusted to keep everything in line. So, democracy imposes term limits. It reminds every leader that their power has a timer running down from the moment they're elected. Leaders who know they must step down eventually, who understand their authority isn't permanent, are more likely to act carefully and thoughtfully, knowing their tenure won't last. Term limits prevent power from becoming too comfortable and leaders too ambitious. Leaders

who hold authority too long risk forgetting they're meant to serve; term limits prevent this complacency.

Then, there's the separation of powers. In democracy, power is divided and distributed so no single branch—executive, legislative, or judicial—can control everything. One branch may create laws, another enforces them, while the third interprets them. This structure is deliberate, knowing that even the best leaders are better off restrained. The authority to make the law isn't handed to the same person tasked with enforcing it, and neither holds the final say over interpreting it. A system of checks and balances builds in natural resistance to overreach, ensuring that no one group or individual can monopolize decision-making or act unilaterally.

Finally, democracy enshrines certain rights that remain inviolable and inalienable, regardless of who holds power. These rights—to dignity, freedom of conscience, protection from torture, and the right to life—form the foundation of democratic freedom. They can't be taken away, even in times of conflict or crisis. They protect the individual from leaders who may grow oppressive or vindictive. They serve as a reminder that, no matter the circumstance, there is a line that power cannot cross. And so, these rights become the ultimate safeguard against the misuses of power

that democracy anticipates.

Each of these structures—elections, term limits, the separation of powers, and guaranteed rights—are not accessories to democracy; they are its core. They're designed not to promote the best possible leaders but to protect against the worst. We put these measures in place because, despite the moments of brilliance and compassion that mark humanity, we know we're not immune to ego, fear, or a desire for control. Those who understand democracy most deeply are often the ones who admit their own fallibility, who realize that they, like everyone, are capable of error. In acknowledging these imperfections, we see the value of democracy's safeguards, knowing they serve to prevent the very mistakes we might make ourselves.

Ultimately, democracy isn't a system built on trust in the goodness of humanity. It doesn't need flawless leaders or pure intentions. It's a system that endures precisely because it doesn't demand perfection; it demands accountability. Democracy is built not to rely on any one person's wisdom or virtue but to protect against the misuse of power when the wrong person inevitably comes along. Democracy survives not because it believes people will always do the right thing, but because it has guardrails that keep everyone in line, even when they don't.

In this way, democracy accepts us as we are, flaws and all. It acknowledges that we are imperfect and creates a system that functions despite our imperfections. And perhaps that's why democracy remains one of the most resilient forms of governance—it's built to stand strong not because we are always at our best, but because it can protect us even when we're at our worst - or stupid.

TWENTY-TWO
Politics: a subculture of culture.

The government you elect is the government you deserve. – Thomas Jefferson

In many countries, especially across Africa, the prevailing belief is that poor governance, economic stagnation, and systemic corruption can be addressed by removing bad leaders and replacing them with good ones. This notion has driven countless political revolutions, yet the outcomes often fail to deliver the transformative change people long for. The cycle of disillusionment repeats, as the new leaders become indistinguishable from their predecessors, and societies continue to grapple with the same problems that sparked the revolutions in the first place. This suggests a deeper issue, one that transcends political systems and cuts to the heart

of societal norms, values, and ethics.

Politics, at its core, is a subculture of culture.

Leaders are not anomalies; they emerge from the societies they lead, embodying the beliefs, aspirations, and moral fabric of the people. A corrupt society is likely to produce corrupt leaders, not as exceptions but as reflections of its accepted norms. In such contexts, individuals who ascend to power often do so with the tacit approval of a society that celebrates wealth and influence regardless of how it is obtained. The rhetoric of change that accompanies political revolutions frequently masks a more insidious truth: many of those who fight to overthrow oppressive regimes do so not out of a desire to dismantle the systems of oppression but to replace the oppressors and claim their turn at power. The phrase "*it's our turn to eat*" encapsulates this dynamic, highlighting the transactional nature of power in many societies.

The real challenge lies in the pervasive cultural attitudes that underpin these dynamics. Corruption, for instance, is not confined to the upper echelons of power. It permeates every level of society, from the local government official demanding bribes to the teacher selling exam results. This normalization of unethical behaviour creates a feedback loop where corrupt leaders reinforce corrupt practices, which in turn shape

the expectations and aspirations of ordinary people. In such an environment, integrity becomes an anomaly, and those who attempt to challenge the status quo are often dismissed as idealists or punished for their dissent. The problem, therefore, is not just the presence of corrupt leaders but the societal culture that enables and even venerates them.

Dictatorial tendencies offer another example of how culture shapes leadership. In societies where authoritarianism is deeply ingrained, it manifests not only in governments but also in families, schools, and workplaces. Parents who rule their households with an iron fist, teachers who demand unquestioning obedience, and bosses who suppress dissent all contribute to a culture of submission to authority. This creates a fertile ground for dictators to rise, as the populace has been conditioned to accept hierarchical, oppressive structures as the norm. Ironically, even opposition movements often replicate these patterns, with leaders exhibiting the same authoritarian behaviours they claim to oppose. Without addressing these cultural underpinnings, political change becomes superficial, merely replacing one form of oppression with another.

The idea that leaders reflect the society they govern is not a justification for their actions but an indictment of the broader cultural context. It

suggests that meaningful change cannot be achieved through political revolutions alone. Even the most well-intentioned leaders will struggle to govern ethically in a society that prioritizes personal gain over collective well-being. The reverse is also true: a society rooted in moral integrity will not tolerate unethical leadership. This is why cultural revolution must precede and underpin political revolution. Through transforming the values, beliefs, and practices of ordinary people, societies can create a foundation for ethical governance.

Cultural revolution begins at the level of the individual but requires collective effort to succeed. It involves a reorientation of values, placing integrity, accountability, and community above selfish ambition. This process must start with education, not just in schools but in families, communities, and places of worship. Ethical principles must be taught, modelled, and reinforced at every level of society. Traditional practices and beliefs, while often a source of identity and strength, must also be scrutinized. Customs that perpetuate inequality, corruption, or exclusion need to be reformed or abandoned, while those that promote unity, resilience, and ethical behaviour should be preserved and celebrated.

In many ways, this cultural transformation is

more challenging than a political revolution. It requires a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths about societal norms and personal behaviour. It demands introspection, humility, and a commitment to long-term change. Unlike political revolutions, which often promise immediate results, cultural revolutions are gradual and require sustained effort. They must navigate the resistance of those who benefit from the status quo and the skepticism of those who doubt the possibility of change. Yet, the potential rewards are far greater. A society that values integrity will naturally demand and produce leaders who reflect those values. Governance will improve, not because of external pressure but as a natural extension of a culture that prioritizes justice and accountability.

The ripple effects of cultural transformation can be profound. When individuals prioritize ethical behaviour, it influences every aspect of society, from how businesses operate to how communities interact. Corruption becomes less pervasive, not because of stricter laws or harsher punishments but because it is no longer socially acceptable. Leaders who attempt to exploit their positions will find themselves isolated and rejected, while those who serve with integrity will be supported and celebrated. This creates a virtuous cycle, where good governance reinforces positive cultural values, which in turn foster better

leadership.

The lessons of history support this approach. Revolutions that succeeded in creating lasting change often began with shifts in cultural attitudes.

In politically fragmented nations, the temptation to focus solely on removing bad leaders is understandable but short-sighted. The deeper, more transformative work lies in changing the culture that produces and sustains those leaders.

This requires reimagining what it means to be successful, redefining power as a tool for service rather than self-enrichment, and fostering a sense of collective responsibility. It means teaching the principles of a good society not just to leaders but to every member of the community, ensuring that ethical behaviour is not the exception but the norm.

The subculture of culture reminds us that politics does not exist in a vacuum. Leaders reflect the people, and people reflect the culture. To break the cycle of dysfunction, societies must address the root causes of their challenges, starting with their own values and practices.

Instead of simply removing the Orwellian Joneses, we must teach the animals the principles

of a just and equitable society. Only then can we prevent the pigs from taking over.

TWENTY-THREE
God is, everywhere.

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. – Acts 17 verses 24 to 25 [New International Version]

We do not choose our religion; it is chosen for us by geography, history, and circumstance. A glance at the African map tells a clear story. The lines drawn by colonizers, marking their territorial claims, align almost perfectly with the dominant religious identities of those regions today. The faith of the colonial master became the faith of the colonized.

In a vast majority of cases, people simply inherit the belief system of their surroundings. A child born in the Middle East is overwhelmingly likely to become Muslim; one born in Israel will grow up

Jewish, while one born in America will likely identify as Christian. Even those who reject traditional religions are shaped by their context; the educated elite across the world often adopt atheism or agnosticism.

Religion, for most people, is less a conscious choice and more a predetermined inheritance.

Despite this, we speak of God with unwavering conviction. We write books, construct doctrines, and build entire civilizations on the notion that we know God. Yet, what do we truly know? There is no single event, no definitive moment in human history, that has scientifically confirmed the existence of a singular anthropomorphic deity. What we have is faith—testimonies of personal experiences, scripture passed down through generations, and communal rituals. These provide comfort and guidance, but they are not evidence in the scientific sense. What we call "knowledge of God" is inference, interpretation, and tradition.

The truth is, we do not know God; we infer God, though we pretend otherwise.

Yet God exists. Not as the anthropomorphic figure most religions describe, but as an undeniable, infinitely intelligent, and powerful force of creation. This force gives life, governs the laws of the universe, and manifests in ways beyond

human comprehension. The mistake humans make is seeing themselves as the pinnacle of creation. In our self-importance, we project our characteristics onto God, imagining Him as a being much like ourselves—only grander.

God, in this view, is a father, a king, a teacher, a being with emotions, preferences, and plans much like our own. But God is not limited to this. God is everything. God is the force behind the wind, the silence in the void, the rhythm of existence itself. *God includes the human-like deity many of us worship,* but God is also far more than that.

Consider this: children in school often believe their teacher exists only within the walls of the classroom. To them, the teacher is not a person with a life outside of school. They do not imagine the teacher as a father, a friend, or a church elder. In their limited understanding, the teacher's identity is confined to their role in the classroom. Humans make a similar mistake with God. We define God based on our limited perspectives, confining this infinite force to roles we can comprehend—creator, protector, judge. Just as the teacher is more than what students see, God is far beyond the roles we assign.

Religion, then, can be seen as humanity's attempt to bring God into focus, to respond to the specific needs of the moment. Each faith tradition

is usually born out of necessity. Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, emerged as a response to Roman oppression, offering hope and preparing the way for the coming *Kingdom of God* (widely read as triumph of Israel over Roman colonisers). Similarly, in Southern Africa, the sacred site of Njelele represents a divine presence deeply rooted in local culture and history – and the need for water in the dry Savannah. In every corner of the world, from the Middle East to the Americas, *God manifests differently*, adapting to the needs, fears, and aspirations of the people. These manifestations are real and meaningful, but they are not the entirety of God. They are fragments, reflections of a greater whole. There is no singular "right way" to understand or worship God. Each faith captures a piece of the truth but misses the vastness of the divine.

Our human minds struggle to grasp the infinite. Confronted with the unknown, we simplify, anthropomorphize, and reduce God to something manageable—something like us. We imagine God as a father, a teacher, a ruler, because these are roles we understand. But God is beyond human comprehension.

Religions are not God; they are interpretations of God, each shaped by the culture and context from which it emerged.

It is like the old parable of the blind men and the elephant. One man, touching the elephant's trunk, declares that it is a snake. Another, feeling its leg, insists it is a tree. A third, holding its tail, believes it to be a rope. Each man is correct in his limited experience, but none fully understands the elephant. Religion works the same way. Different traditions touch different aspects of the divine, interpreting what they feel as the whole truth. Wars have been fought, nations destroyed, and countless lives lost over these interpretations. Each side insists their vision is the only one, never realizing they are all describing the same elephant from different angles.

God, is, everywhere. God is in the atom, and the entirety of the known and unknown universe. He fits His presence into human comprehension, and yet infinitely greater than any human possible imagination. God is not bound by any single image, tradition, or doctrine. Religion offers a glimpse, a pathway, but it is not the destination. To reduce God to one interpretation, one truth, is to miss the infinite presence that surrounds and sustains us all.

God is, everywhere.

TWENTY-FOUR
A human future.

If we are to save the planet, we must save ourselves first. – Sir David Attenborough

"Save the Earth." This phrase is so common that it's nearly invisible; yet, it threads through protest signs, governmental reports, and social media feeds. The idea behind it is an urgent one—an echo of scientific reports warning of breached planetary boundaries, tipping points, and anthropogenic planetary habitat change.

Yet beneath this mantra is an unspoken suggestion: that humanity is somehow separate from the planet, an intruder disturbing its pristine landscape. We're asked to protect the Earth's trees, seas, and creatures, to live gently so the natural world might flourish - even if that means we, the humans, cease to exist from it.

Some go so far as to declare humanity a virus, a blight on an otherwise perfect organism.

But what if the conversation shifted? What if the aim wasn't to save the Earth, per se, but to save humanity? Not in the dystopian, post-human fantasy of an unblemished wilderness reclaiming cities, but in the real, messy, imperfect continuity of human life on Earth—and perhaps beyond it. There is no doubt that Earth's ecosystems need care, nor that our current path is unsustainable. Yet to hold onto the idea of a human future, maybe it's time to save ourselves not as Earth's "virus," but as part of its legacy.

Humanity's story has been one of adaptation and survival. Our species has made its mark through migration, innovation, and exploration, and now, as our relationship with the Earth hangs in a fragile balance, perhaps it's time to consider ourselves not as a planetary blemish but as custodians of the future.

To achieve this, we must reconsider the essentials that allow us not merely to exist but to thrive. Our focus should be on securing a sustainable habitat, clean energy, water resources, and food, while imagining new paths to longevity and vitality for human life. Earth's ecosystems will no doubt benefit from these efforts, but the true

goal is nothing less than to create a future that prioritizes humanity's survival, health, and potential.

Habitat lies at the heart of the issue. Securing a sustainable home for humanity on Earth is the first step, not in a movement toward "zero impact" living, but in establishing a balance where Earth can support its human inhabitants alongside its other forms of life.

Also, we would do well to think beyond our terrestrial limits. Space colonization is not merely a science fiction dream, but a tangible possibility in the near future, offering humanity a hedge against extinction and a continuation of the very adaptability that brought us this far. *Post-Earth humanity* is not a rejection of the planet but an affirmation of our instinct to survive and explore.

Energy is the next cornerstone. Fossil fuels, once our most powerful tools, have become a liability. But beyond merely switching from oil to solar or wind, we need to envision an energy ecosystem that scales with the ambitions of a growing population, from Earth-based living to interplanetary expansion. Nuclear energy, despite its polarizing nature, provides a low-emission alternative capable of sustaining large populations, while the ongoing improvement of renewables will further diversify our options. The path to a

sustainable future is not one of reduction alone, but of abundance achieved responsibly.

Water, too, demands our attention. As freshwater resources dwindle and demand increases, effective capture and distribution systems become crucial. Technology that transforms saltwater into fresh drinking water on a large scale, or efficiently recycles water, offers immediate relief to regions suffering from scarcity. Imagining humanity's expansion beyond Earth only heightens this need, as lunar or Martian colonies will require self-sustaining water supplies. The irony is that the same technology that might one day support life in space could first prevent droughts and famine here at home.

Food security presents another challenge. The simplistic call to reduce environmental impact by curtailing food production ignores the complexity of the problem. Feeding a growing population requires sustainable agriculture that boosts yield, minimizes waste, and shortens planting-to-harvest times.

Bioengineering, responsible animal husbandry, and a diversified diet that reduces reliance on resource-intensive crops can create resilient food systems, capable of feeding humanity while supporting Earth's ecological fabric. After all, food is more than mere sustenance—it's culture,

memory, and community, the soil from which civilizations have grown.

Population growth, for all the anxiety it stirs, can be managed responsibly. When education, healthcare, and economic opportunity are abundant, birth rates stabilize naturally, creating societies that are vibrant yet sustainable. A future-oriented society is one that fosters growth without overreach, embracing cultural and spiritual well-being as much as it does economic progress. A stable population allows for long-term planning and resource management, transforming the spectre of overpopulation into an opportunity for balanced, thoughtful development.

In all of these areas—habitat, energy, water, food, population—the role of technology is critical. Yet it is not technology alone that will save us, but how we choose to wield it. Progress must serve human lives directly, not merely in theory but in the concrete terms of daily life. Innovations should aim to provide not just survival, but a life worth living. They should be directed at creating a more equitable, resilient society, one in which technological advancement translates to human fulfilment and flourishing.

Perhaps it's time we shift our environmental goals toward the actual welfare of people. Saving the Earth may not be possible without first

focusing on saving humanity. Without people, what is a pristine forest, a clean ocean, or an untouched wilderness? Earth may survive our worst impacts, but the true legacy of environmentalism should be a liveable world for future generations, not a world scrubbed of human presence. Saving humanity does not mean abandoning environmental concerns; rather, it amplifies them. It calls for a vision of Earth as both our home and our launching pad to whatever comes next.

The future will demand more than survival. It will demand wisdom, courage, and a return to seeing ourselves not as the planet's scourge but as part of its fabric. Humanity has the potential to grow not as a parasite but as a partner to the ecosystems we depend on. We are custodians of Earth's life-support systems not out of guilt, but out of necessity. Environmentalism isn't only about ecosystems; it's about creating a world that we can be proud to leave behind, a world capable of sustaining a vibrant, humane future.

The Earth does not need saving for its own sake; it will likely outlast us, and if we vanish, it will recover in time. The real question is whether we are willing to save humanity—not as a species separate from nature, but as a vital part of it. A human future is one that cares for the planet, not out of penance, but out of the deep knowledge that

our fate is entwined with it. We are here to create a world that not only survives but thrives with us in it, a place not for an Earth post-human, but for humanity post-Earth, in all the boundless spaces we can imagine.

TWENTY-FIVE
And then we die.

When I come to the end of the road
And the sun has set for me
I want no rites in a gloom filled room
Why cry for a soul set free?
Miss me a little, but not for long
And not with your head bowed low
Remember the love that once we shared
Miss me, but let me go.
For this is a journey we all must take
And each must go alone.
It's all part of the master plan
A step on the road to home.
When you are lonely and sick at heart
Go to the friends we know.
Laugh at all the things we used to do
Miss me, but let me go.
— Miss Me, But Let Me Go, Unknown Author

Death. We all know it. We may try to ignore it, evade it, or dress it up in flowery language, but the truth remains: we die.

This simple, unavoidable truth haunts every single one of us, whether we admit it or not. The more we try to outsmart time, the more we race against it, the more we distance ourselves from the one thing that will inevitably come. It doesn't matter how much we succeed, how hard we fight, how much we love or hate—one day, we will simply stop breathing. And there is nothing we can do to stop it.

It is strange, isn't it? We spend our lives chasing so many things. We chase success, security, the fleeting moments of happiness, yet the truth that looms over us remains: all of it ends. Our efforts to live well, to be remembered, to matter—none of it ultimately saves us from the finality that death brings. There is no exception. We all die.

Yet somehow, in the face of this certainty, we persist. We act as though we are exempt, as if immortality is within our reach if we just try hard enough. We forget that everything we hold dear, every part of our existence, is temporary. It is transient. The people we love, the homes we build, the careers we carve out—they will all fade in time. The cities we live in will change, the streets we walk on will eventually be erased, and the people who are important to us now will become memories. And still, we carry on as though we have forever.

But death is not something we should dread,

not something we should mourn with despair. Because in its very nature, death holds a profound truth: we lived. The moment we die is a confirmation that we existed, that we were here. Death is not an enemy, it is a reminder. It is the punctuation at the end of the sentence, the full stop that says: "You mattered. You lived."

To mourn death is to miss the point altogether.

The grief we feel when we lose someone, when we lose something, is not for death itself, but for the emptiness left in its wake. But death is not empty. It is full of meaning, of life. It is a reflection of the truth that our time is finite, and in that finiteness, we can appreciate the beauty of the moment.

We die in so many ways long before our physical bodies give out. Parts of ourselves die every day. The friendships we once had, the jobs we once cared about, the dreams we once chased—they all die in small, quiet ways. We wake up one day and realize that we are no longer the person we were. We no longer live in the city we thought we'd stay in forever, we no longer have the same passions that once defined us, and we no longer find meaning in the things we thought were important. These deaths are part of us, part of our evolution, part of what it means to live.

Death, then, is not something to resist, but something to embrace. It is simply another step in the journey. Every ending is just another beginning. Every death creates space for new life, for new versions of ourselves.

And the reality is, we often forget that we are constantly surrounded by death. Not just the death of our physical bodies, but quiet death. The silent gradual death of possibilities, of relationships, of phases in life. When we lose a job, it is a form of death. When a relationship fades, it dies. When we move on from one phase of life to another, we bury the old version of ourselves. Death is not a singular event; it is a regular occurrence, woven into the fabric of our lives.

And this should not sadden us; it should remind us that life is precious, fragile, and ever-changing. The more we hold on to the things that inevitably pass, the more we waste the time we have left. We are often so focused on the future, on what's next, that we forget to truly live now, in the present, where we actually exist. We rush through our days, not noticing how fleeting each moment is. We make plans, we strive, we worry—and all the while, time slips through our fingers.

When death arrives, it doesn't announce itself. It comes quietly, sometimes unexpectedly, often unnoticed until it is too late. But in its quiet arrival,

it reminds us of something profoundly important: *we are here, now*. Not tomorrow, not yesterday—now. We should live in this moment, not wait for some distant future when everything will finally fall into place. We should live as though this moment is the last, because, in truth, it could be.

And then there's the matter of legacy. We like to think that we will be remembered. We spend our lives building legacies—whether in the form of achievements, wealth, relationships, or ideas—in the hope that when we die, we will leave something behind that will endure. But the truth is, the world moves on. All the people we know will die, and they will take their memories of us with them. Our funeral will be attended by a handful of people, and their attendance will depend as much on the weather as on our significance. The world will move on. Time does not stop when we die. And eventually, the last person who ever remembers us will die too. The last person to ever know or read our name will also fade into the past, and with them, our memory will be lost.

Does that mean our lives have no meaning? Far from it. The fact that we are forgotten doesn't erase the fact that we lived. It doesn't diminish the joy, the pain, the love, or the connections we made while we were here.

We live, and in that living, we matter.

Even if the world will eventually forget us, the impact of our lives remains. And in this moment, in the brief span of our existence, we can choose to live fully. We can choose to embrace each moment, each relationship, each experience, as if it were the last.

Because, in the end, death is not something to fear. It is a part of life. It is a reminder to live, to love, to create, to be present. It is the reminder that time is limited, and that no matter what we accomplish or fail at, our lives will eventually come to an end.

So, instead of rushing toward that end, we should slow down and truly experience what it means to be alive. We should celebrate the fleeting moments, not regret them. We should love fiercely, live boldly, and embrace the beauty of impermanence.

And when death comes—whether it is the death of a relationship, a job, a home, or our very selves—it will be a reminder that we lived. We loved. We mattered. And that, in the grand scheme of things, is enough.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

What is to give light must endure burning. – Viktor E. Frankl

So, what am I supposed to write here? Is *"Mthokozisi Mabhena is a human observer residing in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. He thinks and writes about the sort of things that people do not like talking about lest they discover they are different, and then be rejected. If you are not shy to have lengthy honest conversations about the human condition - whether on phone or in person - you can reach him at blah blah blah..."* enough?

Will that sort of biography tell you anything about me or about why I authored this book? Don't get me wrong, it is sort of clever, and I like people thinking that I am clever. I am also vain like you. Like all of us.

In that vein/vain (phonetic puns don't work in writing, do they?), yes, in that vain, I would have

told you that I have a first class degree in Entrepreneurship. Or that I have had my own startup and supported others in their quest to make a dent in the world. I am sure you would have thought of me as important. Not important like in the grand scheme of things. But important *somewhere*. Or to *someone*.

That biography would have missed me - and factually wrong in some respects.

I am a lover, an addict, and a human being.

I wrote this because I love life so much. I love when kids are happy playing in the safe street. I love it when I log in on Facebook and see friends updating about their trips, marriage, pregnancy, and purchases. I am a romantic. As a romantic, I want to see this world get better. And this is me saying "look here, don't you think we can do better than this?"

I am addicted to life. I love life. To firmly feel your feet on the soil after the rain from the previous night. The scent of rain. To look at van Gogh's work one more time. I am addicted to poetry, good cup of coffee, and an unpretentious book.

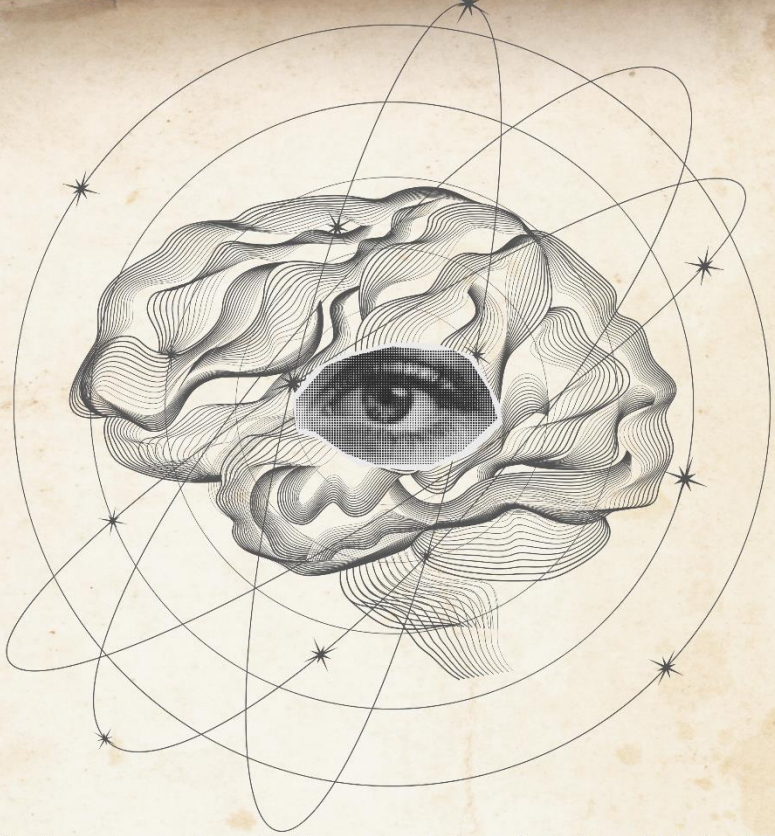
And above all, I am a human being. I know my life

is a just a speck in a cold ever-expanding uncaring universe. I know us, humans, as far as we know, we are all what we got - and maybe, for that reason alone, we should make the world a better place - *for everyone*.

How is that for a bio?

Anyways, you can actually WhatsApp text me on **+263 777 245 294** or email me at **mabhenamthokozisi@gmail.com**

I hope this book is/was worth your time - and thank you for giving me your attention.



In *Learning to See: 25 Essays on Life and Society*, Mthokozisi Mabhena explores the overlooked truths shaping our modern world. From the fragility of democracy to the dangers of algorithm-driven realities, this thought-provoking collection examines how we've lost sight of our shared humanity. Mabhena challenges readers to confront uncomfortable questions: What does it mean to be human? How can we reclaim truth in a fragmented world? Drawing from personal insights and global issues, this book is a call to action for rediscovering reality, fostering empathy, and building a better future. A compelling read for anyone seeking clarity in chaotic times.

Mthokozisi Mabhena is a Zimbabwean researcher, partnerships builder, business developer who, through writing, explores the human condition. Holding a first-class degree in Entrepreneurship, he has built startups and supported others in pursuing meaningful change. Passionate about life, art, and shared humanity, Mabhena advocates for a better world through empathy and truth.